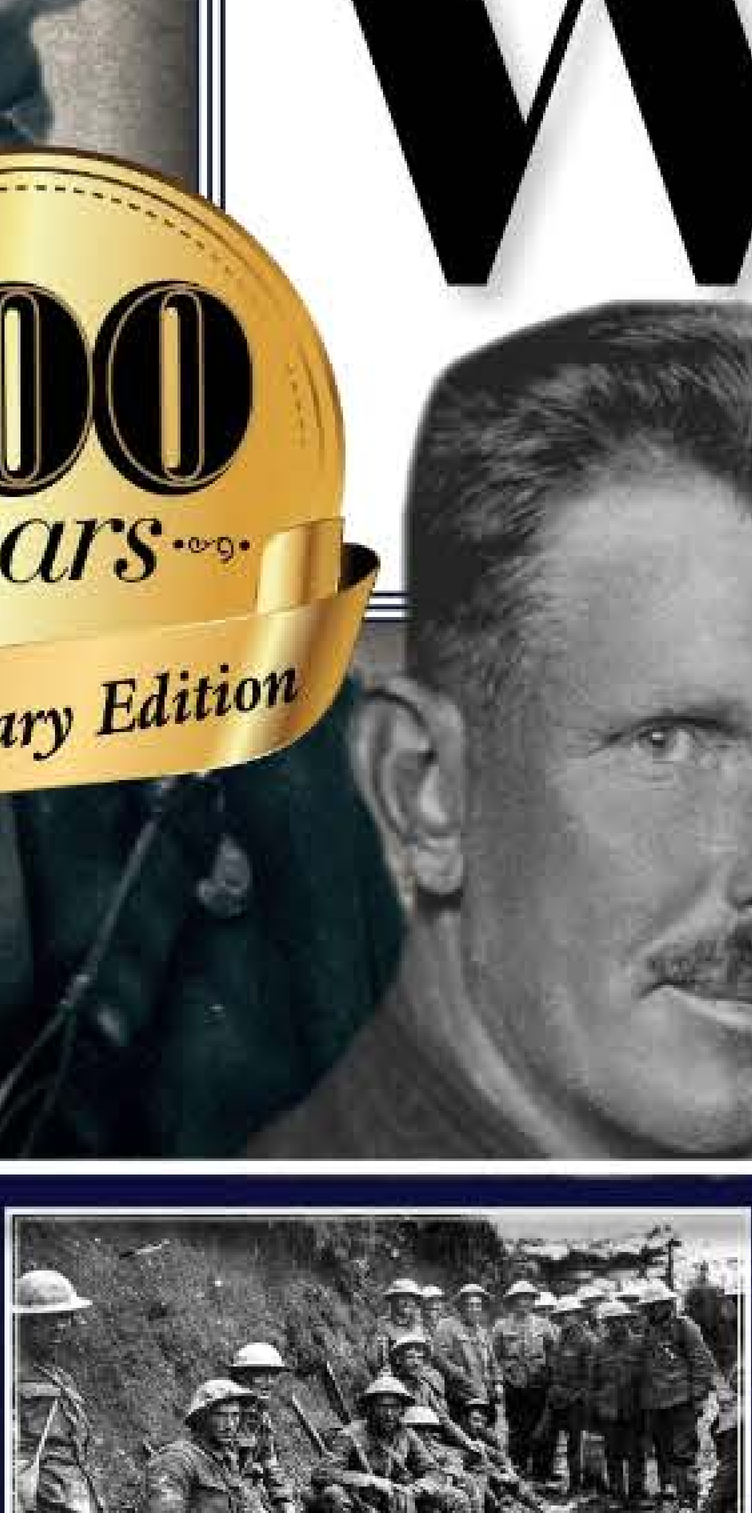
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HEROES OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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HEROES OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

World War I was barely two months old when *The Times* published a poem, written just weeks into the conflict by Robert Laurence Binyon, entitled 'For the Fallen'. Its solemn stanzas would come to encapsulate not only the devastating loss of life caused by the war that was supposed to be over by Christmas 1914, but also the way that we remember those who served in it. Not all of those featured in this book fell in WWI, and not all of those who fell in WWI are featured in this book – yet they are all worthy of remembrance. Whether they returned home to fight another day or their remains lie forever in some foreign field, the men – and women – of the armies, navies, air forces and support staff on both sides of the greatest war the world had then seen, all displayed the kind of courage, selflessness, determination and tenacity that is worthy of only one word: heroism. For the past century, we have answered that heroism with the promise that Binyon made in his poem, a pledge to never forget, so that the suffering and sacrifice of these heroes was not in vain:

"They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them."

HEROES OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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Heroes of the First World War

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A HISTORY OF WWI

THE ASSASSINATION OF FRANZ FERWDINAND

Bosnia and Herzegovina
28 June 1914

After Bosnia and Herzegovina were annexed by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Franz Ferdinand, the heir of the empire, travelled to Sarajevo to inspect the army. A Serbian nationalist group, called The Black Hand, conspired to supply seven young students with weapons for an assassination of Ferdinand. After a failed assassination attempt, the Archduke decided to return home via a different route, but nobody told the driver. As the car stopped to turn, Gavrilo Princip, one of the conspirators, spotted the car and shot. By 11.30am, Prince Ferdinand had bled to death.



A depiction of Franz Ferdinand's assassination

GERMAN U-BOAT CAMPAIGN

Atlantic Ocean, North Sea and Mediterranean Sea
28 July 1914 - 11 November 1918

The U-boat Campaign was an effort by the German military to destroy the trade routes of the Entente Powers. With the British Empire relying heavily on imports for food and supplies, the German U-boats were commanded to sink all Allied or neutral ships on sight. This led to the sinking of almost 5,000 ships and pushed Prime Minister Lloyd George to order an armed naval convoy for all ships carrying provisions, equipment or weapons to the British Isles.



A British propaganda poster from WWI

WWI TIMELINE

AUSTRIA DECLARES WAR
Blaming the Serbian government for Franz Ferdinand's assassination, Austria-Hungary formally declares war on Serbia.
28 JUNE 1914



GERMANY DECLARES WAR ON RUSSIA
Germany offers support to Austro-Hungarians and Russia, allied with Serbia, mobilises. In response, Germany declares war on Russia.
1 AUGUST 1914

GERMANY INVADES
Germany declares war on France and implements the Schlieffen Plan, invading Belgium. Britain orders Germany to withdraw.
3 AUGUST 1914



BRITAIN DECLARES WAR ON GERMANY
Germany refuses to withdraw from neutral Belgium and as a result Britain declares war on Germany.
4 AUGUST 1914

THE BATTLE OF TANNENBERG
The Russian army march into Prussia, but struggle to get supplies through, suffering a crushing defeat to the Germans.
26 AUGUST 1914



TURKEY JOINS THE WAR
Turkey enters the war on the side of the Germans and contributes forces to a naval bombardment of Russia.
29 OCTOBER 1914



1914 — 1915

THE SINKING OF THE LUSITANIA
RMS Lusitania, a ship carrying 139 American passengers, is sunk in the German U-boat Campaign, prompting furious protests from the US.
7 MAY 1915



SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES
Germany unleashes poison gas en masse for the first time – banned under the Hague Convention – claiming thousands of casualties. The Germans were surprised by the effectiveness of the new weapon and thus didn't fully exploit the situation.
21 APRIL - 25 MAY 1915

CHURCHILL RESIGNS
In response to the bloodshed at Gallipoli, Winston Churchill resigns as First Lord of the Admiralty. He returns to the army as a battalion commander.
MAY 1915

GERMANY LIMITS SUBMARINES
In an effort to keep the USA out of the war, Kaiser Wilhelm suspends unrestricted submarine warfare.
18 SEPTEMBER 1915



The LZ 18 Zeppelin, the largest one ever, caught fire in October 1913, before entering service

THE ZEPPELIN RAIDS

England Dec 1914-Aug 1918

Named after its German inventor Ferdinand von Zeppelin, the zeppelin was a balloon-like airship with a covered metal frame used by the German forces throughout the war. These 'blimps' were used for naval reconnaissance but were made infamous for their use in strategic bombing raids against England. Nicknamed 'baby-killers', these airships made 51 bombing raids, killing 557 people and injuring another 1,358, most of whom were civilians. Amassing a total of £1.5 million in damage, the Zeppelin raids finally came to a stop with the introduction of aeroplanes, which could shoot them down with relative ease.



Conditions in WWI trenches were squalid

THE BATTLE OF VERDUN

France
21 Feb-18 Dec 1916

In response to the increasing threat of German invasion, the French attempted to build an impassable line of sunken forts extending from the Swiss frontier to the French city of Verdun. The Battle of Verdun was a German campaign to 'bleed the French dry.' Germany was successful in claiming the French forts but quickly became distracted by the British attack on the Somme and the Russian offensive in the East, allowing France to reclaim the forts. Nine months later, with enormous casualties on both sides, neither force had gained a real strategic advantage.

THE BATTLE OF GALLIPOLI
Sanjak of Gelibolu
25 April 1915-9 January 1916

After a Russian appeal for aid, the British launched an expedition to take the Gallipoli Peninsula, hoping that by doing so they would knock Turkey out of the war. The campaign was a fiasco, as the Turkish repelled the Allied forces from fortified high ground, amassing huge numbers of casualties on both sides – 252,000 Allied and 218,000 Ottoman. After months of fighting and no gains on either side, the British forces withdrew.



***HMS Irresistible* abandoned on 18 March 1915**

THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME
France
1 July-18 November 1916

Fought between the armies of Britain and France against the German Empire, this five-month battle took place on either side of the river Somme in northern France. Originally planned as a battle of attrition, the German Verdun offensive prompted the date of the planned attack to be brought forward. Although the numbers were highly in their favour, the Allies failed to destroy the German barbed wire and concrete bunkers, transforming no man's land into a mess of mud and craters. As the infantry pushed forward, the Germans manned their machine guns and picked off the soldiers with ease. One of the bloodiest battles in history, the Battle of the Somme claimed the lives of over 420,000 British, 200,000 French and 500,000 German soldiers. Gaining the Allies just 12 kilometres (7.5 miles) of ground, Sir Douglas Haig's decisions during the battle are still a source of great controversy today.



THE BATTLE OF JUTLAND
Although the British suffer heavy losses, the German Navy is largely put out of operation for the remainder of the war after this battle.
31 MAY 1916



USA DECLARES WAR
In response to the sinking of more US ships by the German U-boats, the United States join the fight against Germany.
6 APR 1917



BATTLE OF CAMBRAI
Utilising tank warfare, the British artillery penetrate the German Hindenburg Line. These tactics will play a large part in the fighting throughout 1918.
20 NOV - 7 DEC 1917



HINDENBURG LINE COLLAPSES
After a 56-hour long bombardment, the Allied forces break through the last line of German defences on the Western Front, the Hindenburg Line.
29 SEPTEMBER 1918

KAISER WILHELM II ABDICATES
Faced with a German revolution, Kaiser Wilhelm resigns as emperor of the German Empire and king of Prussia.
9 NOVEMBER 1918



1916 1917 1918 1919



IMPORTANT TELEGRAPH
American President Woodrow Wilson is given the Zimmerman Telegram by British intelligence. It urges Mexico to side with Germany, promising US territory in return.
25 FEBRUARY 1917

BATTLE OF PASSCHENDAELE
Acting against the wishes of British PM David Lloyd George, Douglas Haig leads an offensive to reach the Belgian coast. Heavy losses result on both sides.
31 JULY - 6 NOVEMBER 1917



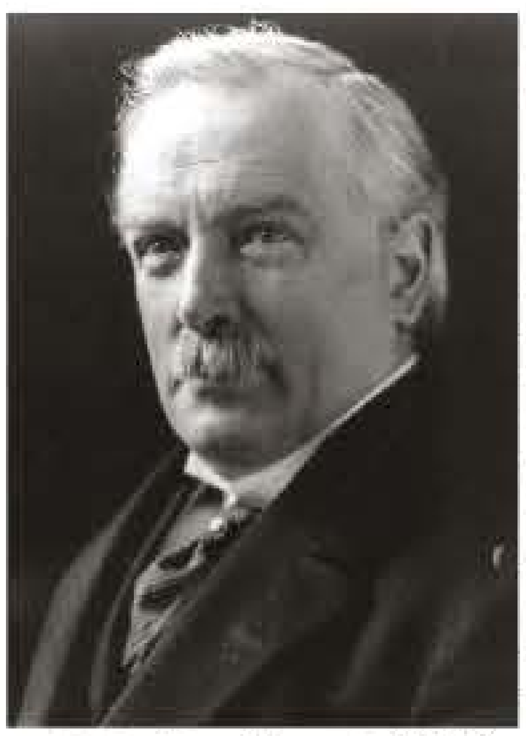
THE TREATY OF BREST-LITOVSK
The Russians sign an armistice with Germany. The terms are harsh, with Russia surrendering Poland and Ukraine.
5 DECEMBER 1917

TURKEY MAKES PEACE
Known as the 'Armistice of Moudros', the hostilities in the Middle Eastern theatre finally come to an end.
30 OCTOBER 1918

THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES SIGNED
Five years to the day after Ferdinand's assassination, the Treaty of Versailles is signed.
28 JUNE 1919

LLOYD GEORGE BECOMES PRIME MINISTER
Great Britain
7 Dec 1916

After becoming critical of Prime Minister Asquith due to repeated military failures in the war, and with the support of the conservative and labour leaders, Lloyd George became the Liberal wartime prime minister. His concentrated wartime cabinet meet every day, increasing the pace of action during the war. Lloyd George was highly untrusting of his war secretary, Douglas Haig, whom he accused of needlessly sacrificing lives. He agreed to the instatement of French Marshall Ferdinand Foch as supreme commander of all Allied forces, which he hoped would limit Haig's power. Lloyd George's determination to achieve unity of military control among the Allies had a great influence on victory.



David Lloyd George became Britain's prime minister during WWI

RAF FORMED
Great Britain
1 Apr 1918

Comprised of the Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service, the RAF was formed to combine the strengths of both organisations. The RAF were involved in major offensives on the Western Front. Now the world's oldest independent air force, the RAF served a vital part of military operations throughout WWII and up to the modern day.

ARMISTICE OF COMPIÈGNE
France
11 Nov 1918

This agreement ended the First World War. Now celebrated as Armistice Day, the cease-fire commenced on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. The terms of the armistice were mainly written by the French Marshal Ferdinand Foch and included the withdrawal of German troops and exchange of prisoners.



The armistice put an end to the hostilities but had to be prolonged until the Treaty of Versailles

LEGENDARY LEADERS OF WORLD WAR I

Leaders during the Great War let nothing stand in their way, not the enemy, not rivals, not even allies, in their quest for victory. Some were forced to step down, but others soldiered on – unstoppable to the end

WORDS **WILLIAM E. WELSH**

The Western Front served as the cockpit of the Great War, and it was on that front that the outcome of the conflict was decided. Each of these ten key figures bore momentous responsibility for the fate of their respective countries during the Great War.

Nine of the ten prominent figures profiled herein were directly or indirectly involved in supporting the Western Front operations of their respective nations or empires. Six of the ten key figures were either commanders-in-chief or chiefs of the general staff. Depending on the exact scope of their job and their nationality, these generals bore various titles, but their work was similar in many respects. Their jobs required a deep familiarity with the demands of logistics and mobilisation, a thorough understanding of modern strategy and tactics, and strong leadership and diplomatic skills.

These high-ranking commanders were Joseph Joffre, Ferdinand Foch, Douglas Haig, John J Pershing, Paul von Hindenburg, and Erich Ludendorff. Each leader bore an immense weight on his shoulders. They were responsible for their country's victory or defeat and for the fate of millions of soldiers lives they held in their hands.

Although he did not lead Russia's war effort until after Tsar Nicholas II's abdication, General Aleksei Brusilov conducted an offensive of such great renown in 1916 that it bears his name to this day. Brusilov found a way on the Eastern Front to avoid egregious casualties in a successful, large-scale attack against the Austro-Hungarian army. The attack so unravelled the Austro-Hungarian military leadership that in its aftermath the German supreme command stepped in and led its forces for the remainder of the war.

Statesmen such as German Emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, and US President Woodrow Wilson are included because of the role they played not only in galvanising their people into the war effort, but also for marshalling the industries necessary to prosecute the war. Nearly all of these key figures are household names. Each left his unique and indelible stamp on the course of the war.





Kaiser Wilhelm II aspired to be a great general but lacked the slightest degree of military genius

KAISER WILHELM II

Nationality: German **Position:** Emperor

Kaiser Wilhelm II pushed Europe into total war with scant appreciation for the great harm it would cause the continent

Kaiser Wilhelm II stood at the head of the most efficient army at the outset of World War I, with 3.8 million men under arms. Yet he was devoid of any appreciable talents as a military commander. "All he wished was to feel like Napoleon, to be like him without having to fight his battles," said Winston Churchill of the Kaiser.

The vain, bellicose, paranoid and recklessly confrontational German emperor had by the outbreak of the war not only alienated foreign leaders, but also his own ministers and generals. His antics on the world stage would have been comical if he had not pushed the world to the brink of war. He sought to carry forward the Prussian military tradition but proved woefully incompetent as a strategist.

His political aim in the years leading up to World War I, was the fulfilment of Weltpolitik, the foundations of which were the acquisition of overseas colonies, creation of a global navy, and aggressive diplomacy. He was complicit in the unchecked rush to war in the wake of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination in June 1914.

Once Germany became bogged down in a protracted, two-front war, he strived to influence German military operations, but his advice was disregarded at the outset of the war by Chief of the General Staff Helmuth von Moltke and Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg. Like a child he could not stick consistently to one sound strategy, but vacillated back and forth between eccentric military policies and the desire to make overtures of peace to Germany's enemies.

He eventually alienated so many of his generals that by 1916 he found himself with no choice but to accept the so-called Silent Dictatorship of Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff. When Germany failed to achieve victory, they ordered him to abdicate and accept exile in The Netherlands. No longer having any real power, he meekly complied.



Third cousins Kaiser Wilhelm II (right) and Tsar Nicholas II communicated at length in the so-called Willy–Nicky correspondence before the war in which they tried but failed to avoid war

PAUL VON HINDENBURG

Nationality: German
Position: Chief of the German General Staff

Paul von Hindenburg rescued Germany in an early hour of great need, but failed it over the long haul with a bankrupt strategy of total war

More than 220,000 Russians were marching into the rear of the Germany army on the country's eastern frontier in August 1914, just two weeks after the start of the war. It was a dire situation. Called from retirement at the age of 65, Prussian-born General Paul von Hindenburg boarded a special train and rode with his new chief of staff General Erich Ludendorff straight to the endangered front. Together they masterminded the German victory at Tannenberg that annihilated the Russian Second Army. The victory catapulted Hindenburg into the pantheon of Germany's greatest war heroes.

Hindenburg personified the Prussian military tradition. Promoted to field marshal following Tannenberg, he assumed control of all German forces on the Eastern Front in autumn 1914. Dignified, confident, and calm, he stepped forward to manage a complex war on two fronts. Hindenburg became a grandfather figure to the Germans. With his right-hand-man Ludendorff, with whom he was "one in thought and action," to quote his own words, Hindenburg ascended to a 'silent dictatorship' in which he enjoyed power that rivalled that of the Kaiser.

Following his promotion to field marshal, a power struggle ensued with German Chief of the General Staff Erich von Falkenhayn over military priorities. Hindenburg ultimately replaced Falkenhayn in the key post in August 1916. From that point forward, Hindenburg instituted plans and initiatives that were manifestations of his belief in total war. These included the armaments program that bore his name, unrestricted submarine warfare, and the spring offensive of 1918. Rather than carry Germany to victory, these failed efforts revealed an overall lack of sound strategy and political skills found in the great commanders of history. In the end, he failed the soldiers and citizens of Germany.


Hindenburg (left) referred to his symbiotic relationship with Quartermaster General Erich Ludendorff as a happy marriage


Douglas Haig's air of superiority intimidated subordinate officers who were afraid to question his plans



DOUGLAS HAIG

Nationality: British
Position: Commander in Chief, British Expeditionary Force

Douglas Haig tried unsuccessfully over the course of the war to break through German defences on the Western Front, running up high casualties in the process

First Army commander Lieutenant General Douglas Haig desperately wanted his forces to achieve a breakthrough at Loos in northern France in September 1915. He threw his reserves in on the second day, but the Germans had already reinforced their positions and it was a missed opportunity. The experience is a metaphor for the breakthrough that always seemed to elude Haig.

Climbing the ladder to the top, Haig was more than willing to knock others out of the way. He blamed the failure of British forces at Loos on Field Marshal John French, and Haig succeeded him in December 1915 as commander-in-chief of the British Expeditionary Forces. Like other generals, he underwent many hard lessons in tactics during the Great War.

On the positive side, Haig was optimistic, unflappable, and focused. On the negative side he was aloof, arrogant, and combative. A trained cavalry officer, he clung to the idea that mounted troops could exploit a breakthrough. To his credit, though, he was open to some of the new weapons such as tanks. He used them in the Somme offensive of 1916, but in numbers too small to make a difference.

At the Somme, and again a year later at Passchendaele, he simply did not know when to abandon a failed offensive. He continued to feed men into the meat grinder of trench warfare when he should have stopped months earlier. The British and Commonwealth forces suffered 420,000 and 260,000 casualties respectively at the Somme and Passchendaele. This alone was reason enough for the sobriquet 'Butcher Haig'.

The wheels of victory began to turn in 1918. The British surged forward in the Hundred Days offensives in the second half of 1918. Haig had real staying power, and he was still in command on Armistice Day.



French Commander-in-Chief Joseph Joffre maintained his unwavering belief in offensive warfare even though the death toll hardly justified the minor gains achieved during his tenure

JOSEPH JOFFRE

Nationality: French **Position:** Chief of the General Staff

Joseph Joffre directed the French forces on the Western Front with steadfast determination, maintaining an active defence against the unrelenting German onslaught

French Chief of Staff General Joseph Joffre was a die-hard believer in carrying the fight to the enemy. His bull-headed approach to launching repeated offensives with little appreciable success throughout the first two years of the Great War would ultimately lead to his replacement.

As the Germans gained the initial advantage on the Western Front by launching a surprise attack on Belgium that allowed them to push as far as the Marne River in northwestern France, Joffre put plan XVII in effect, which called for the French to "advance with all forces united" against the Germans.

Joffre's first attack against the Germans on the fourth day of the war failed. To consolidate their line, the French withdrew during the so-called Great Retreat of late August. Joffre's finest hour orchestrating French forces came during the subsequent First Battle of Marne. Sticking to his pledge to attack at all costs, Joffre launched a sweeping counterattack, in concert with the British, on 5 and 6 September, which involved six French field armies. The bold gamble hurled back the Germans.

Joffre was an eternal optimist. At a time when the horrific casualties experienced on the Western Front tried lesser generals' souls, Joffre remained steadfast and confident despite repeated setbacks. Importantly, he never lost the confidence of his troops, who affectionately dubbed him Papa Joffre.

Criticism against Joffre mounted during the year-long German offensive at Verdun in the third year of the Great War. Joffre initially failed to appreciate the depth and breadth of the German assault. Outnumbered and outgunned, Joffre was unable to pull off a successful counterattack.

At the end of the epic battle, the French government replaced Joffre on 13 December 1916. He retired with honour, receiving the title of Marshal of France as he passed the baton to Robert Nivelle.



Minister of War David Lloyd George and First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill in October 1915. Lloyd George's masterful handling of wartime production and logistics offset his strategic naiveté

DAVID LLOYD GEORGE

Nationality: British **Position:** British Prime Minister

Lloyd George broke with the traditions of the Liberal party in order to support the war, believing Britain should maintain its place on the international stage

Even though Britain's Liberal Party, of which British Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George was a member, traditionally opposed war, Lloyd George was willing to break tradition in the face of German aggression. "Britain should at all hazards maintain her place and her prestige amongst the Great Powers of the world," he said in 1911.

After serving seven years in that office, he became Minister of Munitions in May 1915, and then took over as Secretary of State for War in July 1916 upon Lord Kitchener's death. In these important cabinet positions, he persuaded British businessmen to convert factories to producing arms, ammunition, and equipment essential to the war effort.

When he replaced Asquith as prime minister of Britain in December 1916, Lloyd George used his increased powers to centralise wartime production. As a result, British industry and commerce were harnessed in support of Britain's military forces.

The wheels of government turned smoothly for Lloyd George on the home front, but he was stymied in his efforts to influence Britain's battlefront strategy. Lloyd George had a deep-seated distrust of generals, and they in turn regarded him as incompetent when it came to war strategy.

Lloyd George favoured increasing British forces in alternate theatres, such as Italy and Greece, to avoid the heavy casualties incurred on the Western Front. For that reason, he objected to Commander-in-Chief Douglas Haig's plans for a major offensive in summer 1917. Haig and Chief of the Imperial General Staff William Robertson would not take his advice. Lloyd George reluctantly agreed to allow Haig to proceed with the Third Battle of Ypres. After the armistice, Lloyd George served as the senior member of Britain's delegation to the Paris Peace Conference.

ERICH LUDENDORFF

Nationality: German
Position: Quartermaster General

Erich Ludendorff masterminded German's strategy of total war, unleashing a powerful offensive in spring 1918 in an attempt to achieve a victory on the Western Front

Overbearing, belligerent, and arrogant, Erich Ludendorff waged internal war against his rivals in the German army with the same vigour that he waged war against Germany's foes in World War I.

Because of his deep knowledge of the Schlieffen Plan, Ludendorff was assigned to accompany the German Second Army as it swept into Belgium in 1914. He won early fame when he compelled the Liege citadel to surrender.

The German supreme command then appointed him to serve as chief of staff to General Paul von Hindenburg, whom they recalled from retirement to stave off disaster on the Eastern Front. Ludendorff aided Hindenburg in reversing the situation by defeating the Russians at Tannenberg in late August.

Ludendorff clashed repeatedly with German Chief of the General Staff Erich von Falkenhayn. Each had his own idea of how to prosecute the war, and the two ideas did not mesh. Ludendorff unsuccessfully tried to get Kaiser Wilhelm to sack Falkenhayn. When that failed, Ludendorff went around the Kaiser and convinced politicians and industrialists to call for Falkenhayn's resignation. This effort succeeded, and Falkenhayn was fired in August 1916.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff became virtual dictators of Germany in the second half of the war. They embarked on a policy of total war, which finally brought the Americans into the war, tipping the balance in the Allies' favour.

Ludendorff directed the series of attacks in 1918 known as Kaiserschlacht, the Spring Offensive, which targeted the British and Portuguese expeditionary forces in the Flanders Sector. The French reinforced the British, but not before the Germans had driven the Allies to the Marne. Allied counterattacks led to an armistice.

After the war, Ludendorff did Germany the disservice of circulating the so-called 'stab in the back theory' that German was defeated by villainous traitors from within rather than on the battlefield.



Erich Ludendorff (right) holds a map as he confers with Eighth Army commander Paul von Hindenburg at the Battle of Tannenberg in 1914



General Aleksei Brusilov restored Russian honour following the defeats of 1914 with a successful offensive two years later that bears his name

ALEKSEI BRUSILOV

Nationality: Russian
Position: Commander-in-chief, Russian Provisional Government

Brusilov led a Russian offensive that was a spectacular success against Austria-Hungary, showing that it was possible to capture territory from the enemy without appalling casualties

Russian General Aleksei Brusilov showed great promise at the outset of the war while leading the Russian Eighth Army on the Eastern Front. His army penetrated the Austro-Hungarian frontier positions in Galicia, outstripping the progress of other Russian armies. For this achievement, Tsar Nicholas II promoted Brusilov to four-star general in 1915, and he was given command of the Southwest Army Group.

When the Russian northern armies were getting ready to launch an offensive against Germany in summer 1916 to coincide with the Somme Offensive on the Western Front, Brusilov volunteered to lead his forces in a simultaneous attack. The Russian general staff gave him permission to participate in the offensive.

Brusilov had studied the challenges presented by trench warfare and devised a way that he believed he could overcome the difficulty of capturing and holding ground in trench warfare. Rather than mass all of his forces for a breakthrough in one small area as most commanders did, he planned a general attack along the entire length of the enemy's front. The goal was to stretch the enemy's defences to breaking point.

Brusilov unleashed four Russian armies totalling 500,000 men against the Austro-Hungarian positions on 4 June 1916. The well-led Russians overran the enemy's frontline trenches. By the end of the first week, Brusilov's troops had, in some places penetrated enemy territory up to 40 miles from their starting point.

When the offensive was over in September, Brusilov's Russians had inflicted 600,000 casualties on the Austro-Hungarian army, and compelled another 400,000 to surrender. The Brusilov Offensive, as it became known, resulted in a leadership crisis for the Austro-Hungarian army. After the debacle, the Germans took control of the Austro-Hungarian army.

In March 1917, Brusilov was appointed commander-in-chief of the Provisional Government that replaced the failed Tsarist regime.

FERDINAND FOCH

Nationality: French
Position: Supreme Allied Commander

Ferdinand Foch was a master commander with extensive experience in front-line fighting, who rose to the position of supreme commander on the Western Front

Field Marshal Ferdinand Foch rose steadily up the ladder of command. He started the war as a corps commander and before the war was over he became supreme Allied commander. Foch's strengths far outweighed his weaknesses and that had much to do with his success in the upper echelons of command.

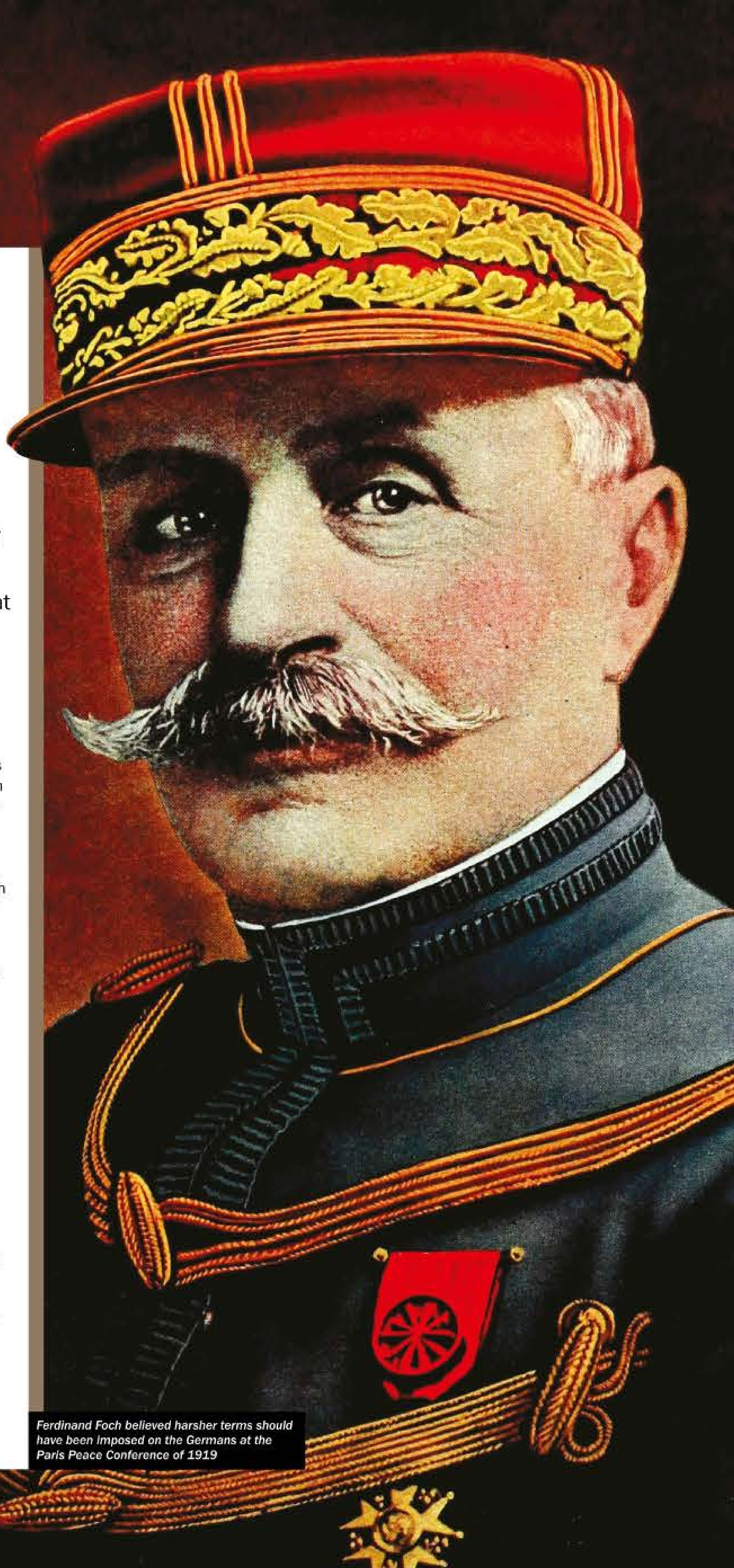
Soldiers and fellow generals admired him because he was a fighter at heart, with plenty of fire in his belly. He proved on multiple occasions throughout the war that he was a master of the counterattack. He was an optimistic, diplomatic, and inspiring man.

French Generalissimo Joseph Joffre took Foch under his wing, and during that time he rose to command of the French Northern Army Group in 1915. During the Somme Offensive of 1916, his troops advanced further than the British. Horrified by the staggering casualties of the offensives on the Western Front, he advocated so-called scientific warfare that relied on new technologies, such as tanks, to help offset high casualties among frontline forces.

Foch's career suffered a key setback in December 1916 when General Robert Nivelle replaced Joffre. While Nivelle was in power, Foch languished in small roles. But he returned to the limelight when General Philippe Petain replaced the incompetent Nivelle in May 1917.

From there, Foch rocketed into the stratosphere. He led reinforcements into Italy to shore up the sagging Italian front following the German victory at Caporetto in late 1917. Afterwards, Foch was promoted to Supreme Allied Commander in March 1918, which put him above all other generals on the Western Front.

As Supreme Allied Commander, he set the strategic goals for the Allies in the West and directed national armies to parry each blow of the enemy. During this time, he used his diplomatic chops to rein in the headstrong American general John J Pershing. At the end of the war, Foch negotiated harsh terms for Germany. After four long years fighting the Germans, he was in no mood to be merciful.



Ferdinand Foch believed harsher terms should have been imposed on the Germans at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919

JOHN J PERSHING

Nationality: American
Position: General of the Armies of the United States

Pershing sought autonomy for the American forces on the Western Front and lead a major offensive

US President Woodrow Wilson believed Major General John 'Black Jack' Pershing had the right stuff to lead the American Expeditionary Force to France. He was a trustworthy general, an excellent administrator, and a superb combat commander.

Pershing insisted that his troops fight as an autonomous US national army as opposed to being divided up as reinforcements for the French and British armies. The first Doughboys, as the allies called the US soldiers, arrived in France in June 2017. To put Pershing on par with the other national commanders, the US Army promoted him to full general three months later. The American units, which had to undergo rigorous training before they would be ready for the cauldron of battle, were held in reserve until fully trained.

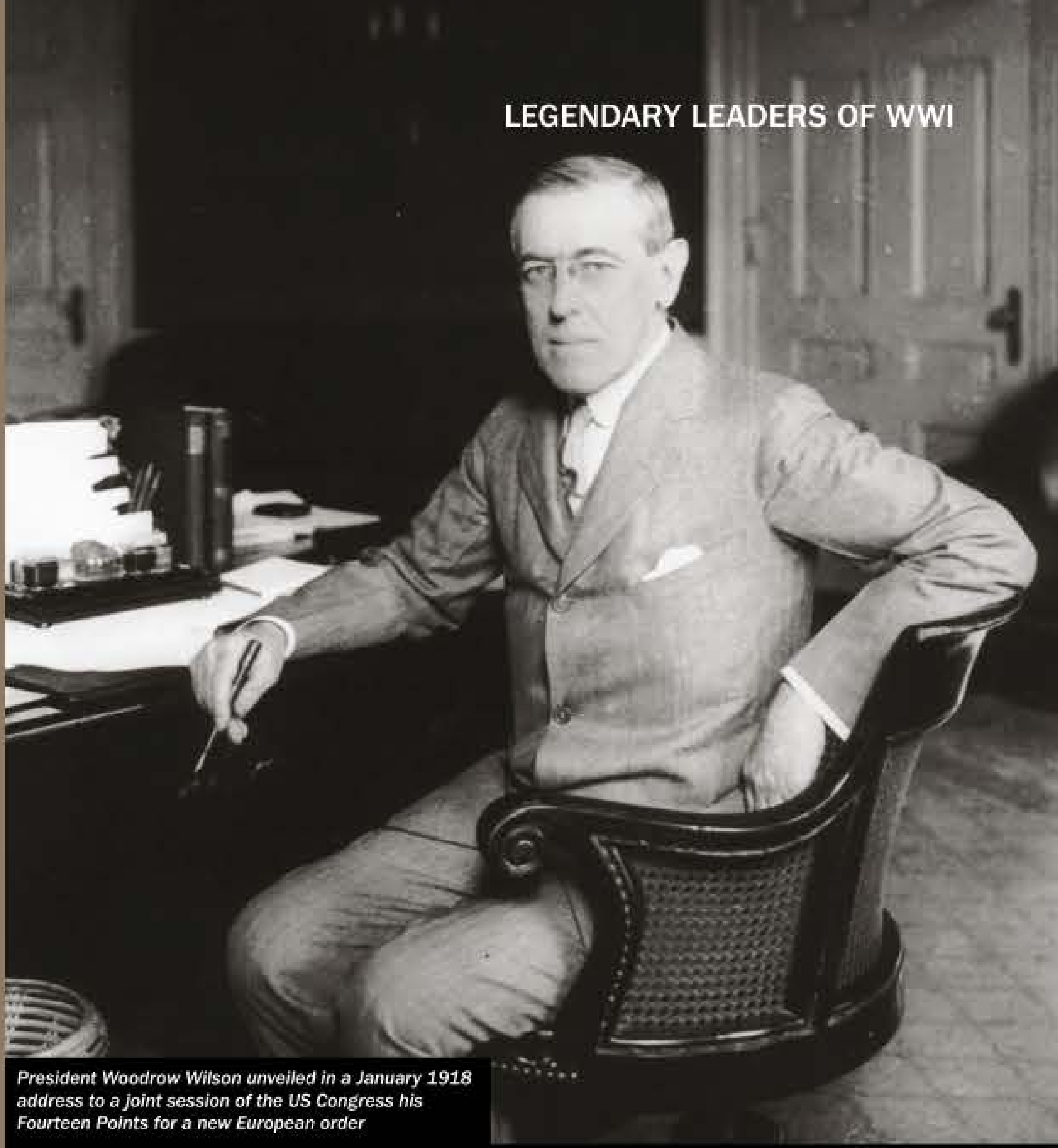
The fury of the Kaiserschlacht compelled Pershing to agree to allow individual US divisions to go into battle piecemeal to prevent the Germans from achieving a breakthrough on the Western Front. By then, Pershing had four US divisions ready. Pershing's Doughboys proved they were superb soldiers in a series of battles in the summer of 1917, which included Cantigny, Belleau Wood, and Château-Thierry.

Foch allowed Pershing to lead his entire army in an independent attack against the German 5th Army in September 1918 in what became known as the Saint-Mihiel Offensive. The Americans fought alongside the French in the Meuse-Argonne offensive suffering heavy casualties.

Pershing believed that unless the German civilians experienced the horror of war first-hand on their own soil, they would not be sufficiently cowed. He favoured unconditional surrender and an invasion of Germany if necessary to achieve that goal. Because of his obduracy, he was excluded from Paris Peace Conference.



Pershing (right) and Supreme Allied Commander Ferdinand Foch clashed repeatedly over how the Americans would be used in battle on the Western Front



President Woodrow Wilson unveiled in a January 1918 address to a joint session of the US Congress his Fourteen Points for a new European order

WOODROW WILSON

Nationality: American **Position:** President

Woodrow Wilson marshalled US resources in support of the Doughboys, but ran into difficulties trying to get his idealistic principles adopted at the peace table

"The present German submarine warfare against commerce is a warfare against mankind," US President Woodrow Wilson said in his War Message to the US Congress on 2 April 1917.

When German Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg announced less than three months earlier that Germany would pursue a policy of unrestricted submarine warfare, Wilson saw it was time to end American neutrality. The German decision proved a costly mistake, for it brought 4.5 million American soldiers and sailors into the war against Germany.

Once he made the decision to go to war against Germany, Wilson threw all his energy into defeating it on the Western Front. With the support of Congress, Wilson instituted compulsory military service, took control of war industries, and controlled the production and distribution of food.

Wilson did not behave like a team player, though, when it came to the United States' military strategy against the German Empire. Specifically, he never agreed to a joint plan with Britain, France, and Italy.

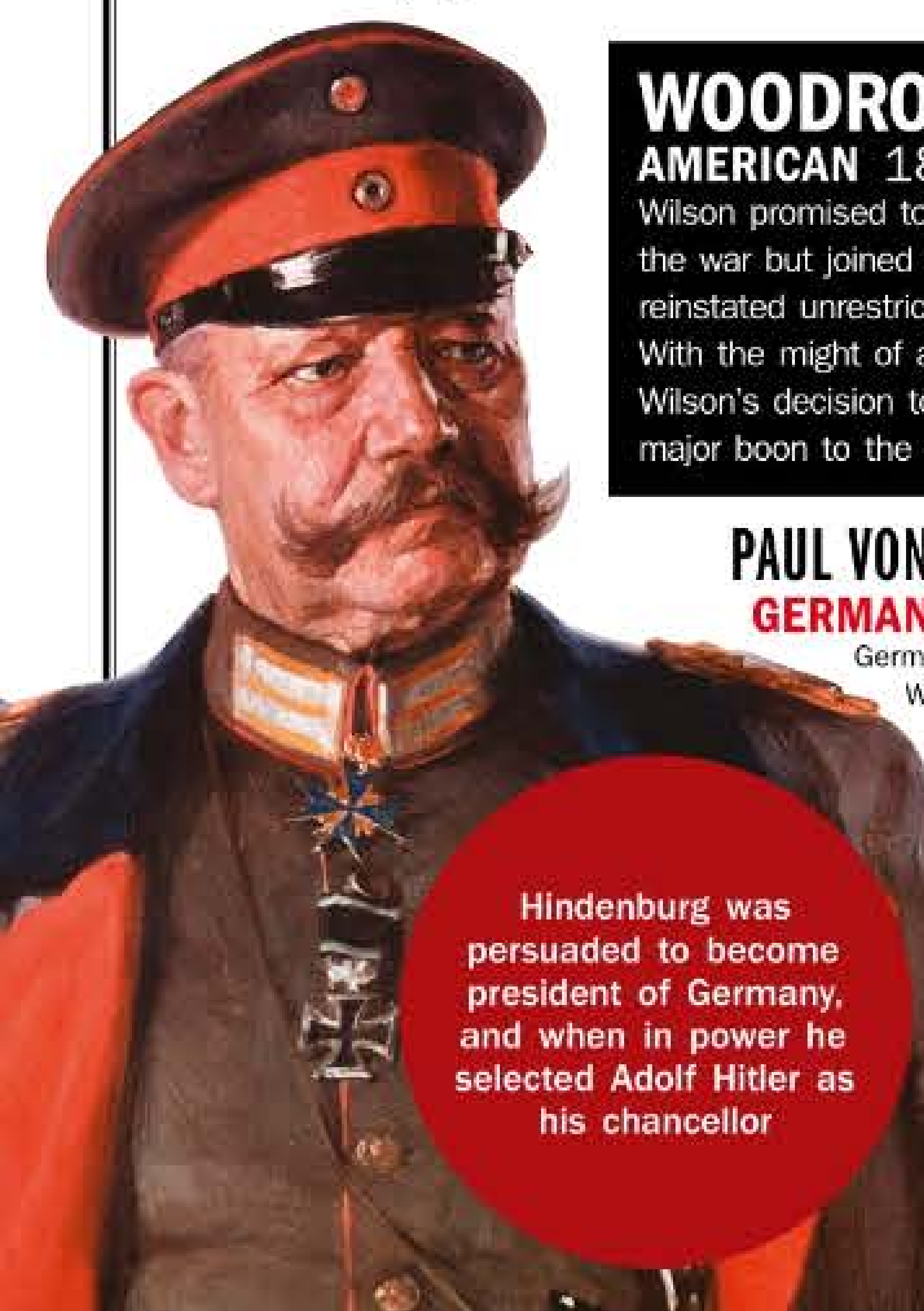
Wilson was an optimist and a visionary. He had a burning desire to shape the post-war world. Wilson set forth his vision in the form of the famous Fourteen Points, a statement of principles that he published in January 1918.

The Germans naively thought that they might achieve leniency from Wilson because of his espousal of fairness, but they were wrong. Wilson deeply despised German militarism, and he was not about to let the aggressive Germans remain a threat to European peace.

The 1919 peace conference was marred by heated arguments among the senior members of the delegations from France, Britain, Italy, and the United States over the provisions. In the end, Wilson had to compromise, which meant abandoning many of his idealistic principles, but the conference did adopt his proposal for a League of Nations.

HALL OF FAME
10 KEY FIGURES FROM WWI

From the gleaming halls of the White House to the muddied trenches of the Somme, get to know ten significant players in the war to end all wars



WOODROW WILSON

AMERICAN 1856-1924

Wilson promised to keep the US out of the war but joined the fight after Germany reinstated unrestricted submarine warfare. With the might of almost 5 million soldiers, Wilson's decision to oppose Germany was a major boon to the Allied powers.



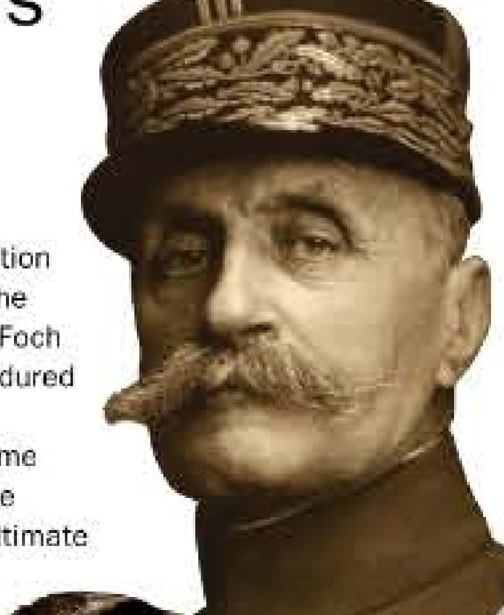
Wilson was the 28th president of the USA

PAUL VON HINDENBURG

GERMAN 1847-1934

Germany's most famed military commander in World War I, Hindenburg was called out of retirement to lead the Eighth Army in Prussia. He became a hero in Germany after victories against the Russians at Tannenburg and the Masurian Lakes. By 1914 he was in command of the Eastern Front and became chief of the greater German general staff in 1916. He helped orchestrate the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Russia and in 1918, when he concluded that Germany could not win, he advised the government to seek an armistice from the Allies.

Hindenburg was persuaded to become president of Germany, and when in power he selected Adolf Hitler as his chancellor



FERDINAND FOCH

FRENCH 1851-1929

Foch commanded the French Ninth Army to a famed victory at the Marne, boosting his reputation and earning him a promotion. He commanded the French forces at Ypres, Artois and the Somme. Foch became a scapegoat for the massive losses endured at the Somme and was briefly relieved of his command, only to be recalled in 1918 as supreme commander of the Allied forces. Eventually made Marshal of France, Foch helped to secure the ultimate Allied victory.

> "MY CENTRE IS GIVING WAY, MY RIGHT IS IN RETREAT; SITUATION EXCELLENT. I SHALL ATTACK"
>
> *FERDINAND FOCH*



EDITH CAVELL

BRITISH 1865-1915

A British nurse, Cavell saved the lives of soldiers from both sides and over 200 Allied soldiers escaped from occupied Belgium to the neutral Netherlands due to her and other nurses' assistance. Known for saying, "Patriotism is not enough", German authorities became suspicious of the outspoken lady and arrested her on 3 August 1915. Charged with harbouring Allied soldiers, Cavell pleaded guilty and was executed by firing squad. There was worldwide condemnation of this, and the date is still honoured as a feast day in the Anglican Church.

In 1917, funds raised by two newspapers in her memory were dedicated to the establishment of rest homes for nurses in England



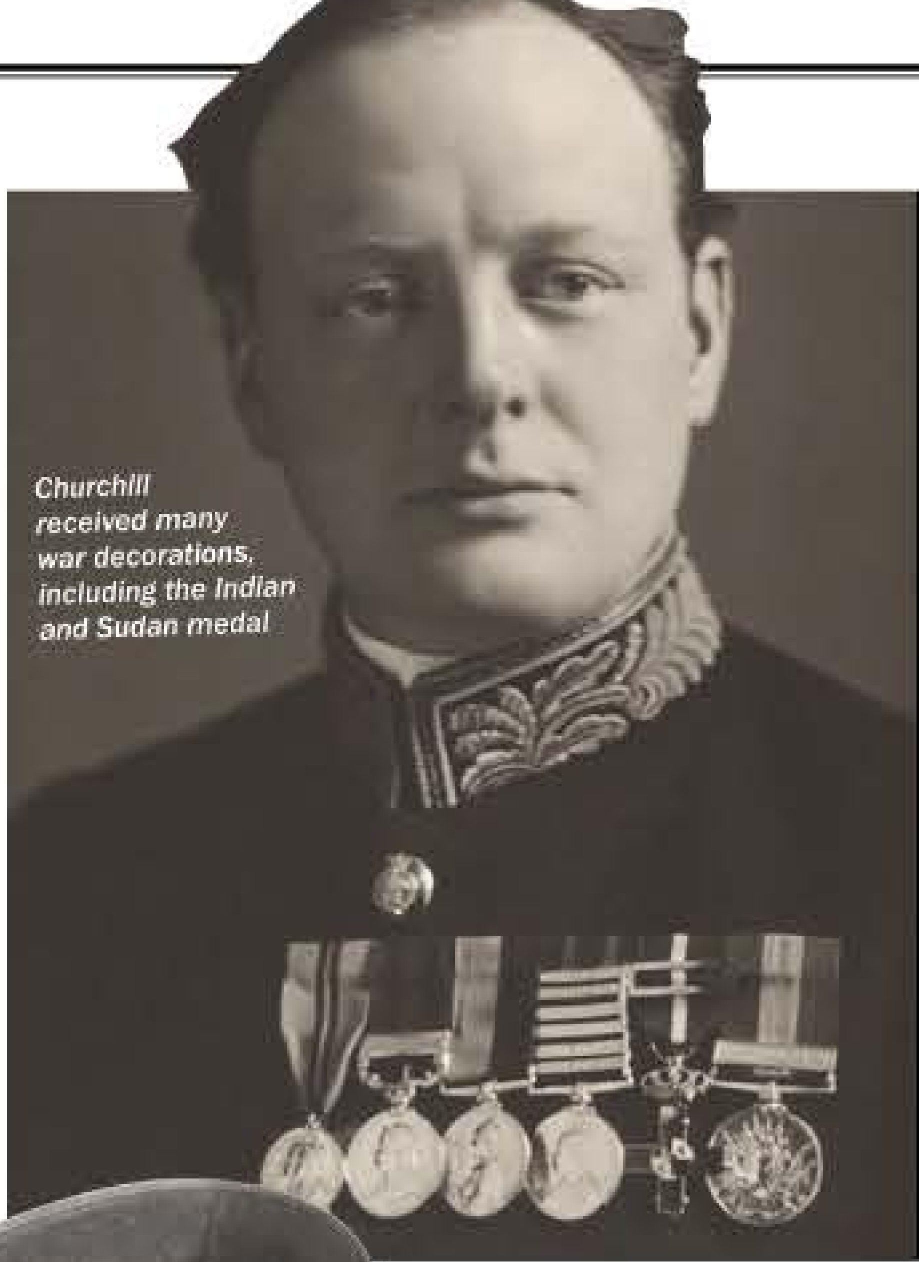
NICHOLAS II

RUSSIAN 1868-1918

The last tsar of Russia, Nicholas confirmed the order for mobilisation of the Russian forces into the war despite being strongly counselled against doing so. In 1915 he made the catastrophic decision to take direct command of the Russian armies. After the Battle of Tannenberg, where the Russian army suffered a disastrous defeat, Nicholas' support at home and in the army plummeted and he was forced to abdicate. When the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany was signed in March 1918, civil war tore quickly across Russia and Nicholas II and his family were executed by communist forces, who had seized power and deposed the tsar and the aristocracy.

On the morning of Nicholas II's coronation day, sudden widespread panic caused a stampede and 1,389 people were crushed to death

Nicholas became tsar in 1894



Churchill received many war decorations, including the Indian and Sudan medal

WINSTON CHURCHILL

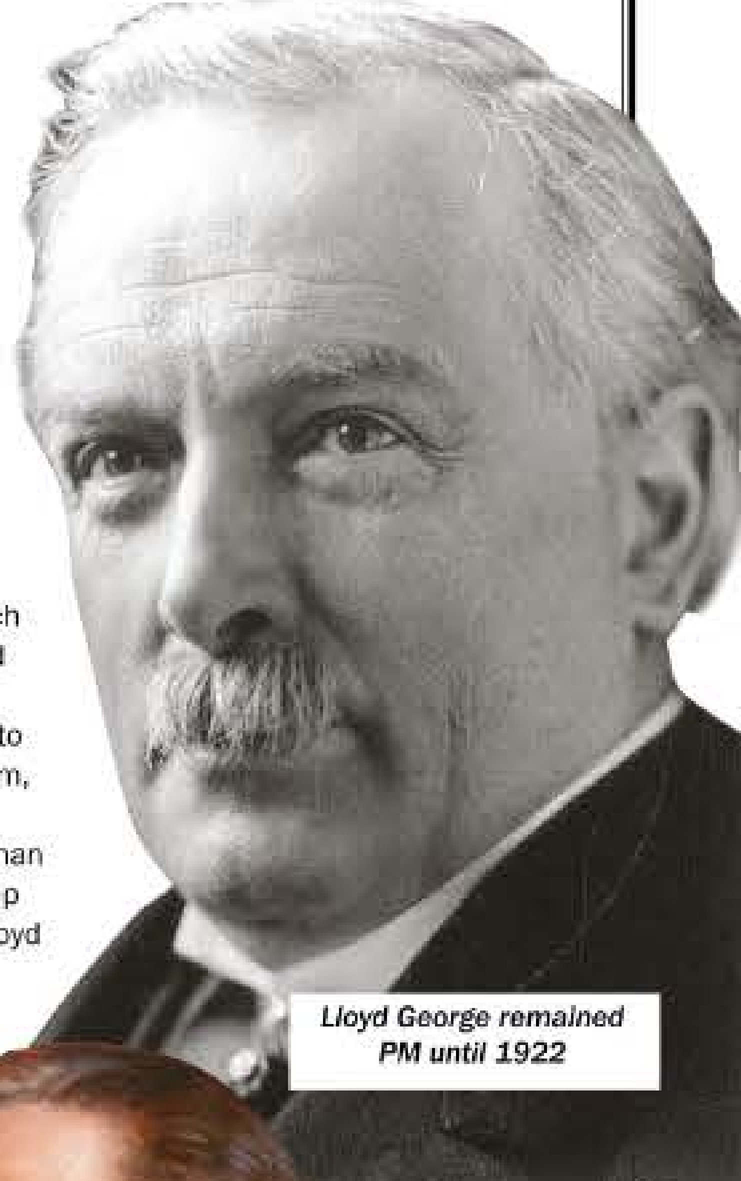
BRITISH 1874-1965

Best known for his pivotal role in WWII when he rallied Europe against the Nazis, Churchill also played a significant part in WWI. Beginning as the First Lord of the Admiralty, Churchill resigned from this position after the disastrous Gallipoli campaign, where 34,072 British soldiers lost their lives. After that he joined the army, commanding a battalion on the Western Front with his typical brand of daring leadership. Upon the instatement of David Lloyd George as prime minister, Churchill returned to cabinet as Minister of Munitions, in charge of the production and distribution of weaponry.

DAVID LLOYD GEORGE

BRITISH 1863-1945

In December 1916, Lloyd George replaced Herbert Henry Asquith as prime minister. Lloyd George wished to bring the Allied forces together, pushing for the instatement of General Foch as commander of the Allied forces. Lloyd George also persuaded the Royal Navy to introduce the convoy system, which protected merchant ships from the deadly German submarines, helping to keep Allied supply lines open. Lloyd George served as Britain's chief delegate at the Paris Peace Conference, contributing to the 1918 Treaty of Versailles.



Lloyd George remained PM until 1922

MANFRED VON RICHTHOFEN

GERMAN 1892-1918

Perhaps better known by his nickname, 'the Red Baron', Manfred von Richthofen was a German fighter pilot of the Imperial German Army Air Service. One of the most famous fighter pilots in history, he was a flying ace of the war credited with over 80 aerial victories, including British ace Major Lance Hawker. Regarded as a hero at home, and feared by his enemies, his nickname was inspired by the blazing red aircraft he manned – he began painting them this colour from 1917. He was shot down over the Somme river in 1918 when chasing a Sopwith Camel, and the 'knight of the skies' was forced to make an emergency landing, which he didn't survive.



Von Richthofen initially joined a cavalry unit in 1911

The Red Baron has been portrayed across popular culture from the comic strip *Peanuts* to numerous movie incarnations



WILFRED OWEN

BRITISH 1893-1918

Owen was sent to the Western Front in January of 1917. After experiencing many traumatic experiences, he was diagnosed with shell-shock and admitted to Craigslockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh. He returned to France and was awarded the Military Cross for bravery, but was killed on 4 November 1918. Widely regarded as the leading poet of WWI, Owen's brutal realism stands in stark contrast to the patriotic writing of most early war poets. His best-known works include *Dulce Et Decorum Est* and *Anthem For Doomed Youth*.

Owen's poems are still admired and studied to this day



SIR DOUGLAS HAIG

BRITISH 1861-1928

Known as 'the Butcher of the Somme', Haig served as the British commander during the Battle of the Somme, the Third Battle of Ypres and the Hundred Days Offensive. With 2 million British casualties under his command, Haig was subjected to widespread criticism of his tactics and leadership. However, through August to November 1918, Haig led the Allied forces to a series of victories against the German army, which ultimately led to the end of the war.

Haig helped to establish the Royal British Legion, campaigning until his death to raise money to relieve the suffering of ex-servicemen

THE PALS BATTALIONS

A massive propaganda drive and feverish patriotism saw communities join the British Army, but it would end tragically in a hail of machine-gun fire

WORDS TOM GARNER



Out of all the destruction of 1914-18 there was a unique trauma that was borne out of a wave of public patriotism: the formation of the 'Pals Battalions'. The story of how large groups of men joined up with their friends and family to serve Britain is one of the most poignant of the war. A disproportionate amount of those who volunteered died on the first day of combat and whole communities were devastated.

When Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, its army was unique among the European powers for being manned by voluntary professionals, as well as its small size: the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) that was sent to France numbered only 120,000 men. Compared with the millions of conscripts in the French and German armies this was puny and it soon became apparent that the BEF was not big enough for the conflict that was unfolding.

A popular assumption was that the war would be over by Christmas 1914, but the Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, thought differently and devised a plan with General Sir Henry Rawlinson and Lord Derby to raise large 'New Armies'. Kitchener envisioned that the war would be decided by the last million men that Britain could throw into battle and Rawlinson felt that men would be more willing to enlist if they were serving alongside people they knew.

A call was issued for 100,000 volunteers, aged between 19-30, at least 1.6 metres tall and a chest size greater than 86 centimetres. The response was impressive with 30,000 men enlisting every day by the end of August 1914 and by mid-September over 500,000 had joined. At the end of the year another 500,000 had been added.

Although the Pals Battalions became associated with working-class men from northern industrial towns, financiers who worked in the City of London formed the very first battalion on 21 August 1914. This unit became the 10th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers but it was commonly known as the 'Stockbrokers Battalion'. This principle of enlisting with workmates or friends was replicated across the whole country and Lord Derby coined the term 'Pals Battalions' in a speech to recruits in Liverpool on 28 August: "We have got to see this through to the bitter end and dictate our terms of peace in Berlin if it takes every man and every penny in the country. This should be a battalion of pals, a battalion in which friends from the same office will fight shoulder to shoulder for the honour of Britain."

This meant that battalions from all social classes, professions and backgrounds were formed. The Glasgow Tramways Battalion shared an employer, the Hull Commercials an occupation, and the Tyneside Irish a common ancestry. However, individuals enlisted for different reasons. Men volunteered because it was considered patriotic to enlist, particularly in the wake of continuous rumours about German atrocities in 'plucky little Belgium'. Some saw enlistment as an opportunity for travel in an age when most Britons could not afford to do so and they were bolstered with the general assurance that the war would not last long.

In many cases, army life was an escape from crippling poverty as military service offered regular pay, proper food and clothing, plus accommodation. Areas dominated by heavy industry provided a disproportionate supply of recruits, but many volunteers were rejected on medical grounds thanks to poor diets and inadequate housing. There were also

"WE HAVE GOT TO SEE THIS THROUGH TO THE BITTER END AND DICTATE OUR TERMS OF PEACE IN BERLIN IF IT TAKES EVERY MAN AND EVERY PENNY IN THE COUNTRY"

BRITAIN'S DOOMED ARMIES

FOLLOWING A MASSIVE RECRUITMENT DRIVE, WHOLE COMMUNITIES JOINED UP IN WHAT WAS KNOWN AS 'KITCHENER'S ARMIES'



14TH, 15TH, 16TH BATTALIONS, ROYAL WARWICKSHIRE REGIMENT

THE BIRMINGHAM PALS
FORMED: 30 AUGUST 1914
STRENGTH: 3,000 MEN

These battalions were posted to Italy at different times during the war as well as serving on the Somme.



13TH-14TH BATTALIONS, YORK & LANCASTER REGIMENT

BARNSLEY PALS
FORMED: SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER 1914
STRENGTH: 2,000 MEN

The 13th Battalion was first posted to Egypt before being sent to France in March 1916. On 1 July, the combined battalions suffered 545 casualties, a loss of over a quarter of their strength.



17TH BATTALION, MIDDLESEX REGIMENT

FOOTBALL BATTALION
FORMED: 15 DECEMBER 1914
STRENGTH: 600 MEN

Founded in Fulham, this battalion comprised of hundreds of professional footballers from 50 clubs including Chelsea, West Ham, Liverpool and Reading. The professional players were also supplemented by amateur players, officials and fans.



103RD BRIGADE, ROYAL NORTHUMBERLAND FUSILIERS

TYNESIDE IRISH
FORMED: 14 OCTOBER 1914
STRENGTH: 5,400 MEN

After enthusiastically raising a whole brigade, the Tyneside Irish advanced on 1 July 1916 to the march of a bass drum but suffered heavy casualties.

"THE VOLUNTEERS WERE EXPECTED TO BECOME OFFICERS IN OTHER REGIMENTS. HOWEVER, MANY CHOSE TO REMAIN AS PRIVATES IN ORDER TO STAY WITH THEIR FRIENDS"



16TH-23RD BATTALIONS, MANCHESTER REGIMENT

MANCHESTER REGIMENT
FORMED: AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1914
STRENGTH: 10,000 MEN

During the course of World War I the Manchester Pals lost 4,776 men out of almost 10,000. The Manchester Regiment in total lost 13,000 casualties, of which 37 per cent were from the Pals.



10TH BATTALION LINCOLNSHIRE REGIMENT

GRIMSBY CHUMS
SEPTEMBER 1914
1,000

Although the collective name for Lord Kitchener's 'New Armies' were 'Pals Battalions', Grimsby was the only unit out of around 304 battalions to be called 'Chums'.



17TH-20TH BATTALIONS, THE KING'S (LIVERPOOL REGIMENT)

LIVERPOOL PALS
AUGUST 1914
4,000 MEN

The Liverpool Pals set the precedent for recruiting northern working men but its volunteers consisted of commercial workers including those who worked in shipping, insurance and brokerage.



11TH EAST LANCASHIRE REGIMENT

ACCRINGTON PALS
FORMED: 14 SEPTEMBER 1914
STRENGTH: 1,100

The most famous Pals Battalion fought bravely on 1 July 1916 but were almost wiped out. The battalion included volunteers not just from Accrington but also Burnley, Chorley and Blackburn.



16TH BATTALION, MIDDLESEX REGIMENT, 18TH- 21ST BATTALIONS, ROYAL FUSILIERS

PUBLIC SCHOOLS BATTALIONS
FORMED: 1-11 SEPTEMBER 1914
STRENGTH: 5,000 MEN

Exclusively made up of public schoolboys and university students, the volunteers were expected to become officers in other regiments. However, many chose to remain as privates in order to stay with their friends.



10TH-13TH BATTALIONS, LOCAL RESERVE BATTALION, EAST YORKSHIRE REGIMENT

1ST HULL 'COMMERCIALS', 2ND HULL 'TRADESMEN', 3RD HULL 'SPORTSMEN', 4TH HULL 'T'OTHERS', 5TH HULL 'BANTAMS'
FORMED: SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER 1914
STRENGTH: 6,000 MEN

Occupations and interests divided battalions from Hull. The 'Commercials' were raised from clerks and businessmen, the 'Tradesmen' consisted of welders and joiners, 'Bantams' were men of 'smaller stature but big hearts' and 'T'Others' were men of any class or trade.

keen recruits from the upper classes with five 'Public School Battalions' consisting of public schoolboys and university graduates.

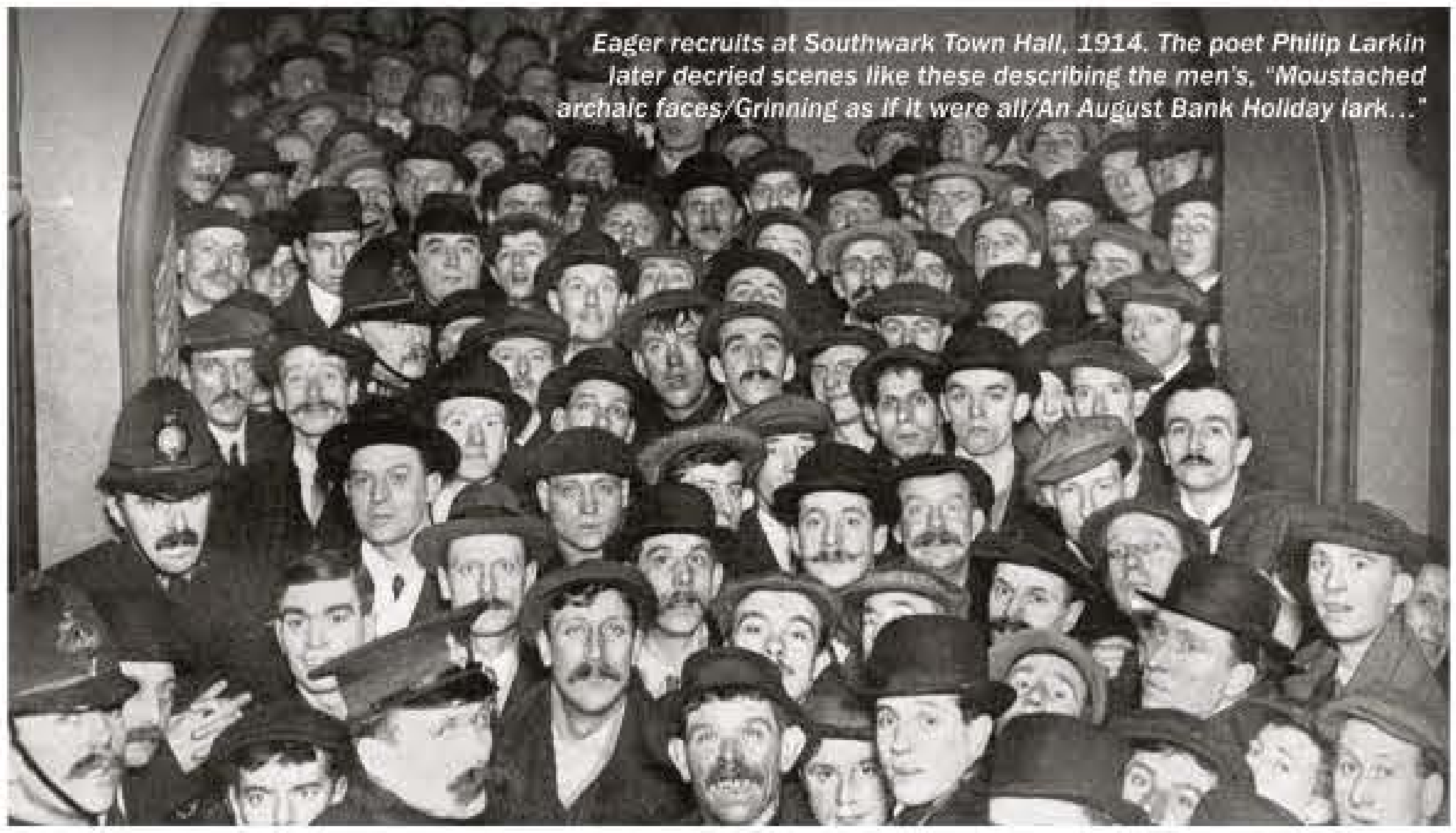
The enthusiasm of the industrial areas for the Pals Battalions was reflected in the speed and numbers of recruitment. Communities would compete to attract the greatest amount of new recruits. A battalion required 1,000 men to become operational but this number proved no obstacle. In Accrington, recruitment began on 14 September 1914 and 104 men were accepted in three hours. Within ten days, the Accrington Pals had reached full strength but this was slow compared with Sheffield, which raised a whole battalion in two days. In Tyneside, there was a race between the Irish and Scottish communities to see who would be the first to raise a brigade – the Irish won.

The enthusiasm did not dim when news arrived about mounting casualties at the front. The bad news strengthened community resolve as volunteering became a duty, with social pressure influencing individuals to join. There was also a heavy propaganda campaign, which was aimed at coercing potential volunteers with the most famous example being the 'Your Country Needs You!' poster depicting Lord Kitchener pointing accusingly at the viewer. Such was the success of this and other placards that an Asquith lady of the early 20th century remarked, "If Kitchener was not a great man, he was, at least, a great poster."

Kitchener had done his job too well and the influx of volunteers meant the army could not process them all at the same time and some battalions had to be temporarily administered by magistrates. They were well trained, but it was often done with outdated equipment under the supervision of elderly officers or non-commissioned officers. Much of what the Pals learned was more appropriate for the colonial wars of the 19th century than a global conflict, so the new recruits training took until 1915-16.

The first three 'New Army' divisions (around 35,000 men) landed in France in May 1915. Reinforcements were desperately needed to reinforce the BEF, but many regulars had reservations about the potential performance of the Pals (or 'Kitchener's Mob' as they were nicknamed). British graffiti was often found with variants of the slogan, 'Lost or Stolen-Kitchener's Army-£5 Reward to Finder'.

Some of the 'Mob' were sceptical, including the future author and playwright JB Priestley who had volunteered in September 1914. He likened his battalion in the Duke of Wellington's Regiment to "A kind of brave rabble." This scepticism was well founded. Thanks to the hasty recruitment process, British society was thrown together in a military melting pot and led by men of vastly differing ages. Henry Webber was a 67-year-old officer in the 7th South Lancashire Regiment, whereas Reginald Battersby, a Second Lieutenant in the 11th East Lancashire Regiment, was only 15.



Eager recruits at Southwark Town Hall, 1914. The poet Philip Larkin later decried scenes like these describing the men's, "Moustached archaic faces/Grinning as if it were all/An August Bank Holiday lark..."

For most in these battalions, their first action would be the Somme offensive, and its disastrous first day. An eight-day barrage had failed to destroy the deeply entrenched German positions and the British commanders, who were concerned about maintaining discipline in the new recruits, instructed the soldiers to walk in formation when the attack began at 7.30am. Unfortunately, this made them easy targets for the emerging German machine gunners and they were cut down in their thousands.

The Pals Battalions took huge casualties; many units recorded grim statistics on 1 July. The Tyneside Brigades suffered terribly, with the Scots enduring 2,400 casualties and the Irish 2,100. Most were killed within the first hour of battle. Both the Grimsby Chums and the Sheffield City Battalion lost around half their men. The Leeds Pals lost 750 out of 900 men.

Many of the Pals' casualties occurred when battalions of the 94th Brigade tried to capture the hilltop fortress of Serre. Units that led the attack included the Accrington Pals and Sheffield City Battalion and were supported by the Barnsley Pals, but they were marching towards the experienced 169th (8th Baden) Infantry Regiment. Even before the attack the Pals arrived in shell-damaged British trenches and were pounded by enemy artillery before daylight broke. At Zero Hour the leading waves were torn by machine-gun and rifle fire.

Some of the Accrington and Sheffield Pals got through to the German frontline but the attack was in vain. Brigadier Rees recorded, "The result of the shells, shrapnel, machine-gun and rifle fire was such that hardly any of our men reached the German front trench. The lines which advanced in such admirable order, melted away under fire; yet not a man wavered, broke the ranks or attempted to go back. I have never seen such a magnificent display of gallantry, discipline and determination." 584 out of 720 Accrington Pals became casualties.

The first day saw the death of the Pals Battalions, but news of their destruction was slow to reach Britain. Relatives often only discovered the fate of their loved ones when letters reached the families of the dead. The casualty lists did not reach Grimsby until 10 July and rumours gripped panicked communities. In Accrington, the brother of one volunteer recalled a scene of grief that would have been replicated across Britain, "I remember when the news came through that the Pals had been wiped out. I don't think there was a street that didn't have their blinds drawn, and the bell at Christ Church tolled all day."

After the Somme campaign was done, the Pals Battalions survived in name only. Enthusiasm decreased and newly introduced conscripts replaced the volunteers. When WWII began, conscription was immediately implemented. The wasteful death of the Pals on 1 July 1916 left a sad legacy. As one surviving Pal put it, "Two years in the making. Ten minutes in the destroying. That was our history."

"RELATIVES OFTEN ONLY DISCOVERED THE FATE OF THEIR LOVED ONES WHEN LETTERS REACHED THE FAMILIES OF THE DEAD"



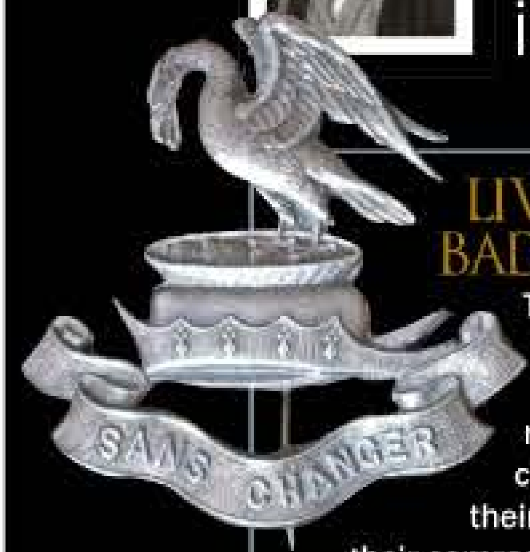
A support company of the Tyneside Irish advance opposite La Boisselle on 1 July 1916. The brigade would suffer 2,100 casualties that day

BATTLEFIELD ARTEFACTS

WORDS PETER DOYLE



Writer, historian and archaeologist Peter Doyle presents some incredible artefacts that survived the battlefield



LIVERPOOL PALS BADGE

This battalion was born on the initiative of Lord Derby, who introduced the notion that men of the 'commercial classes' might wish to serve their country in a battalion of their comrades. Lord Derby took a personal interest in his 'pals', issuing to each one a silver badge bearing his arms. Edward Cole of Bootle wore this one; his brother Stanley was killed on the Somme on 30 July 1916, 'Liverpool's blackest day'.

BARBED WIRE

This has become as much a metaphor for the suffering of World War I as trenches and gas. This twisted, rusty sample is German, and came from Gommecourt, the scene of an ill-fated diversionary attack by the British 56th and 46th Divisions on 1 July 1916. The attack left over 2,000 men dead, five times that suffered by the German defenders – the barbed wire played its part.





TANK MASK

The tank, a British invention of 1915, was designed to cross trenches of at least 2.6 metres wide, and was first deployed in the latter stages of the Somme. They were hot, crowded and dangerous at the best of times, so crews were issued with leather helmets to protect their cranium. Chain mail masks protected their faces and eyes from shards of metal caused by bullet strikes on the machine's body.

SHELL SHARDS

For trench destruction, as well as for demolishing dugouts and other shelters, high-explosive shells were needed. Such shells delivered a huge explosive force, while the exploded shell wall created a high-velocity shower of shell splinters, like these, over 12-inches long, from the Ypres Salient. With the Germans occupying deep dugouts on the Somme, such high explosives were much needed – though less common than the shrapnel shell.





TYNESIDE SCOTTISH CAP

This cap belonged to Second Lieutenant Gilbert Watt Sandeman of the 1st Tyneside Scottish; on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, 1 July 1916, the Tyneside Scots were opposite the fortified village of La Boisselle. Completely in the open, the advancing Tynesiders were caught in a deadly crossfire. The 1st Tyneside Scottish lost 584 men: Sandeman was one of the fortunate ones.

Images: Peter Doyle

SECRET TUNNEL WARS

Below the killing fields of the Western Front in 1916, a little-known struggle also took place in silence and shadows

WORDS **NICK SOLDINGER**

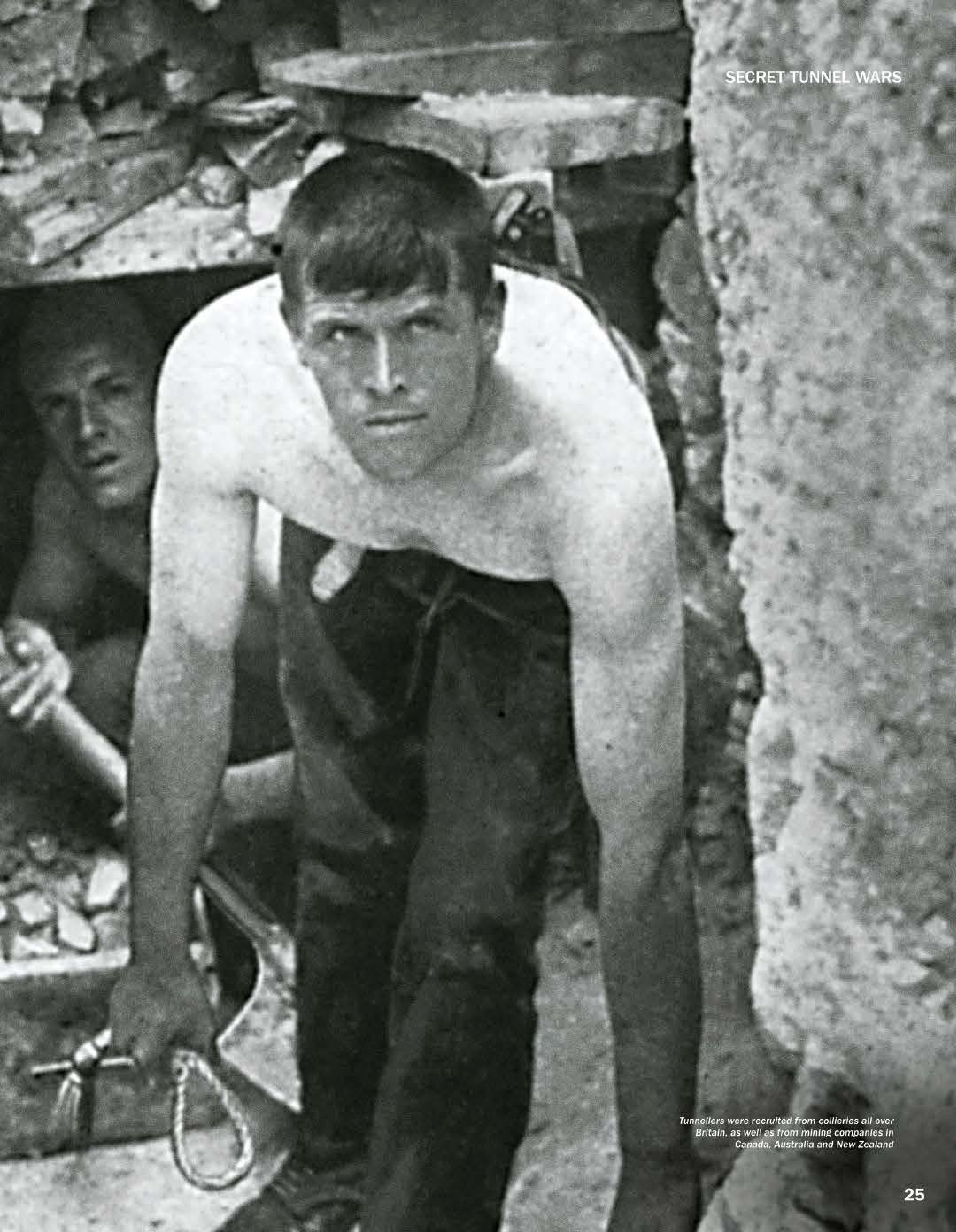
On the morning of 1 July 1916, British fighter pilot Cecil Lewis was flying over La Boisselle in the Somme Valley. The seconds were ticking down to what would become Britain's biggest military catastrophe. By dusk, the fields below would be choked with more than 58,000 British casualties.

At 7.28am, his plane was flung suddenly sideways. "The whole earth heaved and flashed," he later recalled. "A tremendous column rose into the sky. There was an ear-splitting roar, drowning all the guns. The earth rose 4,000 feet. There it hung like the silhouette of some great cypress tree, then fell away in a widening cone of dust and debris."

What Lewis had just witnessed was, at the time, the loudest human-made blast in history. A 60,000-pound mine below the German line had erupted, a mighty herald of the slaughter to come. Within minutes, whistles were blown in the British trenches and, with bayonets fixed, a generation of young men clambered into no-man's land and set off on their one-way journey into oblivion.

The mine came as a surprise to everyone. Everyone, that is, except British high command, the specialist tunnellers who'd worked for months to sneak it under German boots, and tragically, it would transpire, the Germans themselves.





Tunnellers were recruited from collieries all over Britain, as well as from mining companies in Canada, Australia and New Zealand

WHO WERE THE TUNNELLERS?

MANY OF THESE SUBTERRANEAN WARRIORS WEREN'T AS YOUNG AS THE SOLDIERS DYING ABOVE GROUND, BUT VETERANS OF BRITAIN'S GREAT INDUSTRIAL AGE

The men who'd dug their way under the German lines at La Boisselle were rejects. Many had tried enlisting in the army but had been turned down for being too old. These tunnellers, and others like them, were mostly in their 40s, and all highly skilled miners. Many had been as young as 13 when they'd started work and had spent more than 30 years toiling underground. As the trench system on the Western Front locked the fighting into a deadly stalemate, these former has-beens were now recruited en masse to literally undermine the enemy position.

Military mining is as old as siege warfare, but the British Army had no dedicated mining units when war broke out. In fact, it took a civilian entrepreneur to point out the potential for tunnellers to break the deadlock.

Sir John Norton-Griffiths owned a large engineering firm that was busy extending Manchester's sewer system when hostilities began. In his employment were hundreds of 'clay-kickers', skilled labourers whose job it was to excavate the earthworks. These men, he realised, could be used to tunnel silently and quickly under German trenches to plant explosives. So he wrote to the secretary of state for war, Lord Kitchener, to explain how his 'moles', as he called his men, might break what was fast becoming the biggest siege in history.

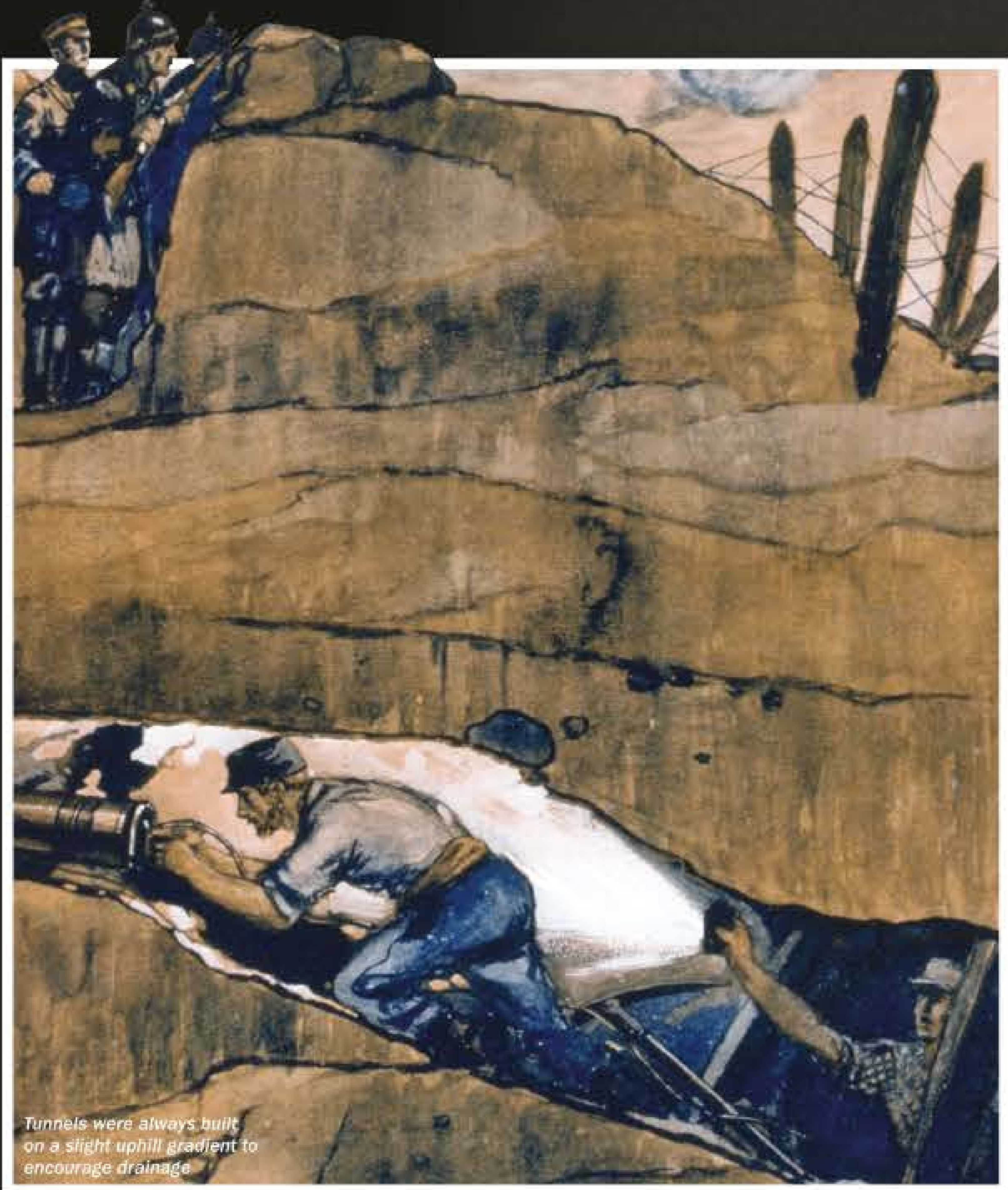
"AS THE TRENCH SYSTEM ON THE WESTERN FRONT LOCKED THE FIGHTING INTO A DEADLY STALEMATE, THESE FORMER HAS-BEENS WERE NOW RECRUITED EN MASSE TO LITERALLY UNDERMINE THE ENEMY POSITION"

Initially, Kitchener showed no interest, but when the Germans did exactly what Norton-Griffiths was proposing and blew up British trenches in Givenchy in December 1914, he summoned the entrepreneur to Whitehall. Norton-Griffiths was then instructed to raise an army of tunnellers. The first men he recruited, naturally enough, were his own moles, and on 18 February 1915, 18 Manchester clay-kickers arrived at Brompton Barracks in Kent, home of the Royal Engineers. Here, they were given medicals, thrust into uniform and, with zero military training, packed off to France. 36 hours later they were under the Givenchy earth, digging defensive tunnels against the Germans. Just days before, the ground above them had been busy with car klaxons, trams and horses' hooves; now it shook from shell fire.

The clay-kickers, however, were only useful in areas where the soil was soft. In places like the Somme Valley where the geology was harder, a different skill set was required. So Norton-Griffiths began looking further than his own workforce. In the collieries across Britain and beyond, he found his army of subterranean soldiers.



French trench diggers, part of the army construction corps called sappers, emerge from one of the tunnels they are digging at the Western Front in July 1916



Tunnels were always built on a slight uphill gradient to encourage drainage

A HERO 80 FEET UNDER

WHEN THE WORLD LITERALLY COLLAPSED AROUND HIM ONE MAN RISKED EVERYTHING TO SAVE THE LIFE OF HIS FELLOW MINER

William Hackett was a typical tunneller. Rejected by the army three times for having a weakened heart, the Nottinghamshire miner was finally accepted into the Royal Engineers in October 1915.

Born in 1873, Hackett had grown up in the slums of Nottingham and, by the time the Great War broke out, had been working down the pits for 23 years.

In June 1916, in Givenchy-lès-la-Bassée, shortly after his 43rd birthday, Hackett and four other men were entombed when an underground blast triggered by Germans digging the other way caused the tunnel they were in to collapse.

Rescuers managed to reach the men and dig all but one of them out. The fifth, however, a 22-year-old from Swansea named Thomas Collins, was injured and unreachable. Although Hackett could easily have escaped at that time, he refused to leave his young comrade, saying: "I am a tunneller and I must look after the others first."

He stayed underground with Collins while other tunnellers struggled to rescue him, but the blast had rendered the whole tunnel system deeply unstable. Four days into the rescue attempt, it collapsed, and both Collins and Hackett were buried alive.

Hackett was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for his act of selfless bravery – the only tunneller of the war to receive Britain's highest military honour. Speaking years later about her husband's heroism, his widow Alice said: "I could never understand the doctors rejecting him on account of his heart. There wasn't much wrong with that, was there?"

"ALTHOUGH HACKETT COULD EASILY HAVE ESCAPED, HE REFUSED TO LEAVE HIS YOUNG COMRADE, SAYING: I AM A TUNNELLER AND I MUST LOOK AFTER THE OTHERS FIRST"

HELLFIRE JACK

THE BRITISH ARMY'S TUNNELLING OPERATION IN WORLD WAR I WAS DREAMT UP AND DELIVERED LARGELY BY ONE REMARKABLE MAN

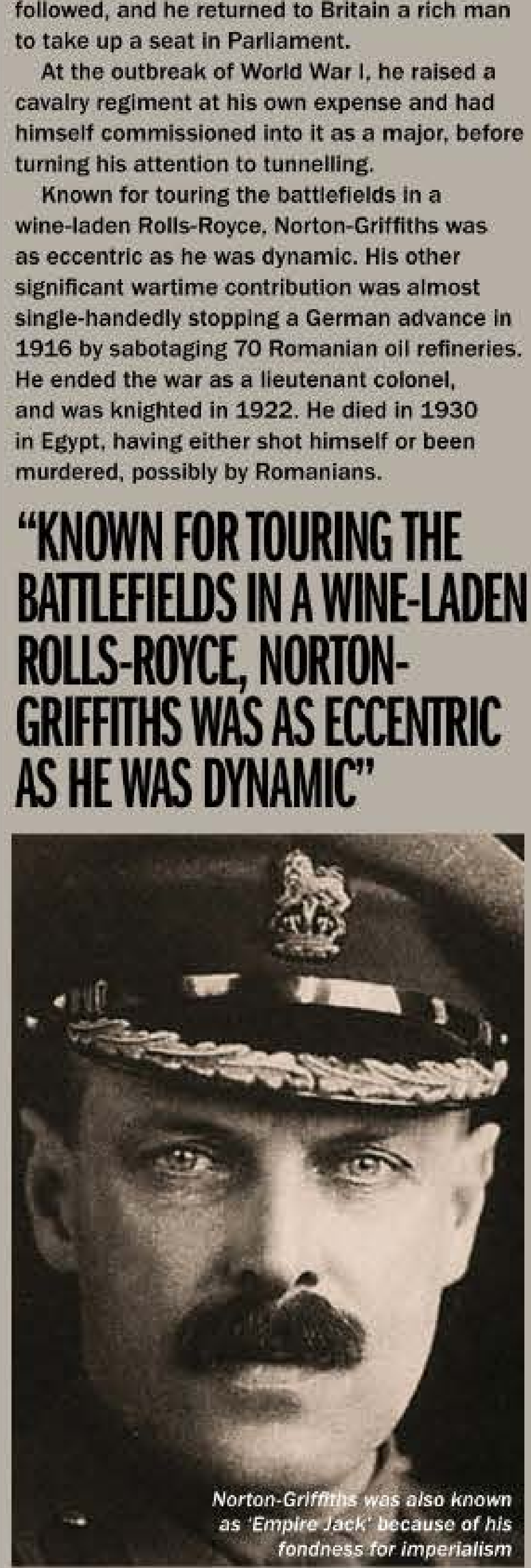
Sir John Norton-Griffiths, the man who inspired the British tunnellers, was an Edwardian celebrity. Born in 1875, this swashbuckling adventurer, whose ferocious temper earned him the nickname Hellfire Jack, started life as the son of a lowly clerk. He ran away from home aged 17, and after a brief stint in the army headed to Africa to work as manager of a gold mine. When the Boer War broke out, he re-enlisted, ending the conflict as a personal bodyguard to the British commander-in-chief.

A series of huge engineering projects then followed, and he returned to Britain a rich man to take up a seat in Parliament.

At the outbreak of World War I, he raised a cavalry regiment at his own expense and had himself commissioned into it as a major, before turning his attention to tunnelling.

Known for touring the battlefields in a wine-laden Rolls-Royce, Norton-Griffiths was as eccentric as he was dynamic. His other significant wartime contribution was almost single-handedly stopping a German advance in 1916 by sabotaging 70 Romanian oil refineries. He ended the war as a lieutenant colonel, and was knighted in 1922. He died in 1930 in Egypt, having either shot himself or been murdered, possibly by Romanians.

"KNOWN FOR TOURING THE BATTLEFIELDS IN A WINE-LADEN ROLLS-ROYCE, NORTON-GRIFFITHS WAS AS ECCENTRIC AS HE WAS DYNAMIC"



Norton-Griffiths was also known as 'Empire Jack' because of his fondness for imperialism

WAR UNDER THE GROUND

THE QUIET AND CAUTIOUS SOLDIERS FACED NO LESS PERIL THAN THOSE UP TOP

The subterranean world carved out by both the British and Germans on the Western Front was an elaborate network of tunnels, galleries and chambers. Here, deep beneath the roar of battle above, men terrified of discovery toiled in total silence, picking their way centimetre by centimetre towards each other's lines. Working with shovel and bayonet in spaces often as narrow as a man's shoulders, they crawled, dug, scraped and fought their way through the ancient layers of earth.



The tunnels were built with the same techniques and to the same standards that the professional miners used in civilian life

1 Tunnel entrance

2 Shaft house
In this timber construction, rubble and soil would be hauled from below in sandbags by a winch and pulley, which would then be transported to the surface by a wooden trolley. Everything had to be shifted by hand.

3 Steel shaft
The presence of quicksand in the soil's stratum along some parts of the front meant that only shallow tunnels could be dug. The British solved this problem by using cylindrical steel shafts known as tubbing to help them reach the firmer ground beneath.

4 Timber shaft
Once firmer ground had been reached, timber was used again to complete the mine shaft. In fact, timber was used throughout the mines as a way of shoring up the walls to help prevent them from collapsing in on the tunnellers.

5 Listening post
These were used to detect enemy tunnelling. Early listening equipment such as the Geophone could detect German digging up to 30 metres away. It replaced more primitive techniques like watching for vibrations in water standing in a biscuit tin.

6 Mine chamber under construction

7 Tunnelling team
Tunnellers worked in three-man teams that consisted of the clay-kicker or miner who dug the earth, the bagger who filled sandbags with soil and the trammer who transported the bags out of the gallery. Working in silence was essential.

8 Completed deep tunnel
Thanks to the steel tubbing and the superior skills of the British tunnellers, who dug about eight metres per day compared to the Germans' rate of two, some British tunnels were up to 37 metres deep and 658 metres long.

9 Sandbag wall
Known as tamping, these were erected at the entrance of completed mine chambers. Stuffed full of soil and rock, these hessian sacks were packed tightly together and designed to force the blast vertically, up into the German lines above.

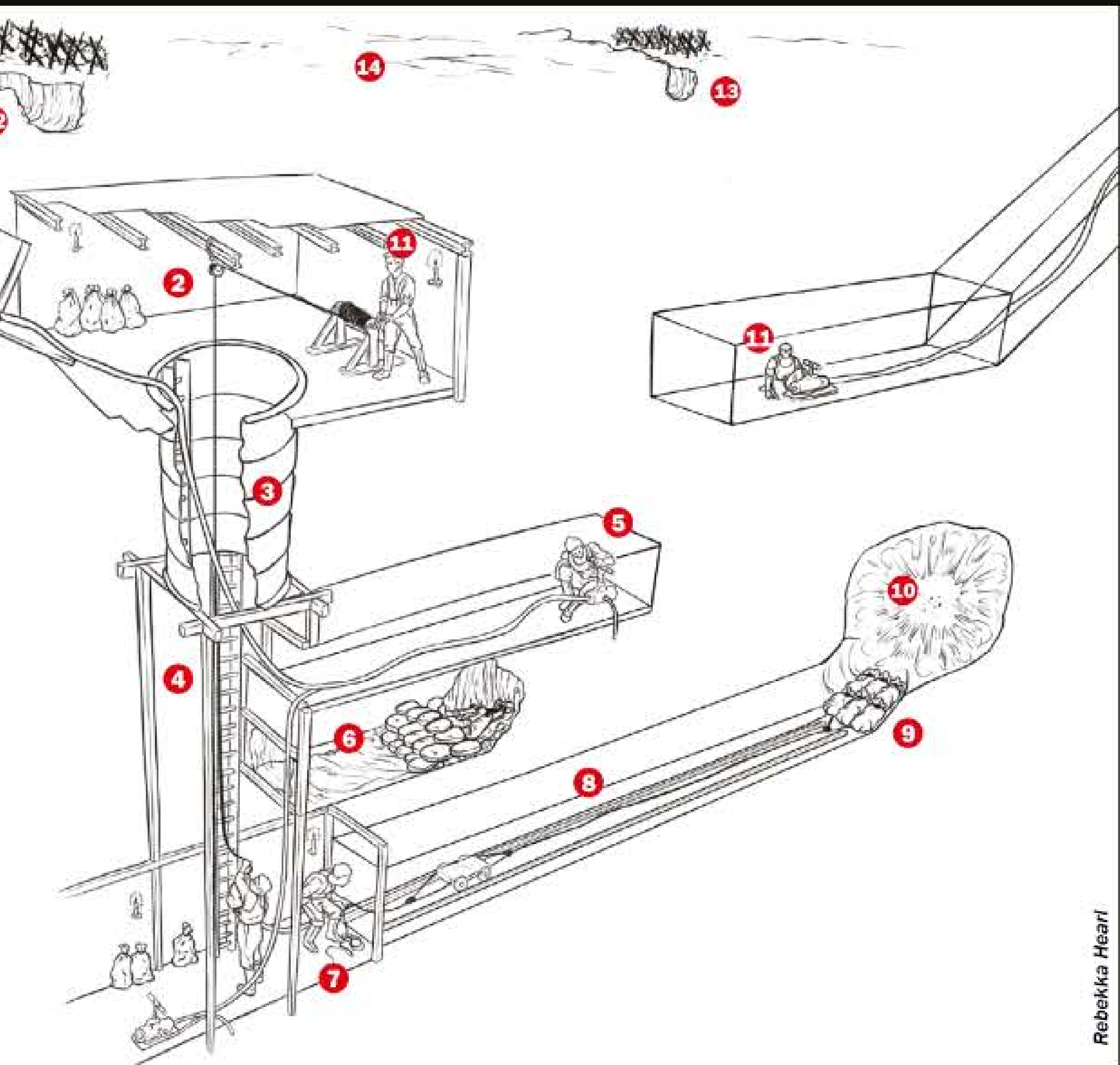
10 Mine chamber

11 German listening post
Among the German equipment used to detect British tunnellers was the Moritz system, which could pick up electrical impulses in the earth. Its presence was to prove crucial to the outcome of the Battle of the Somme.

12 British trench

13 German trench

14 No-man's land



"HERE, DEEP BENEATH THE ROAR OF BATTLE ABOVE, MEN TERRIFIED OF DISCOVERY TOILED IN TOTAL SILENCE, PICKING THEIR WAY CENTIMETRE BY CENTIMETRE TOWARDS EACH OTHER'S LINES"



For many of the British killed on 1 July, the assault at the Somme was their first experience of combat



Seen in this aerial shot, the crater left by the Lochnagar mine bears witness to the size of the blast

TUNNELLING UNDER THE SOMME

IN 1916, THE TUNNELLERS WENT ON THE OFFENSIVE, SPEARHEADING WHAT WOULD TURN OUT TO BE BRITAIN'S COSTLIEST ATTACK OF ALL TIME

In an effort to break the deadlock of trench warfare, in 1916 the British made plans for a summer offensive. The generals looked at the map and pointed to the village of La Boisselle in the Somme valley. It stood on a salient in the German line. Punch holes either side of it with mines and artillery then send the infantry through the gaps, and you'll force the Germans out of their trenches and into open battle. At least, that was the theory. The two points of attack were codenamed Y-Sap and Lochnagar, and the responsibility of reaching them underground fell to the 179th Tunnelling Company, who began excavating the 300-metre-long tunnels immediately.

By early summer they'd made good progress, but as they approached a line of German listening posts, they were forced to work even more cautiously. Shovels and picks were swapped for bayonets attached to shovel handles. These were used to ease out lumps of chalk that were then caught by another tunneller before they could hit the ground. It was painstaking work, and the attack was postponed until 1 July. When it became clear that the Lochnagar tunnel still wouldn't be completed by then, it was stopped short. Two huge mine chambers were then excavated at its end and filled with 24 tons of explosive. A similar amount was planted under the completed Y-Sap tunnel.

Above ground, meanwhile, a giant artillery barrage had begun. For seven days British guns pounded the Germans continuously, firing more than 1.7 million shells. Nothing could survive such an onslaught – or so British High Command believed – and it would be a walkover. The German dugouts, however, were deep, and their troops sheltered inside them patiently. They knew the bombardment couldn't last forever. They also knew an assault would start when it stopped – they just didn't know when.

Then, on the night of 30 June, they found out. In a German listening post, a Moritz machine picked up a telephone message to British troops holding the line. It said: "Good luck tomorrow morning." With those four words, the unwitting well wisher condemned thousands of his countrymen to death.

At 7.28am the following morning, the barrage stopped. As British infantrymen lined up in front of their trench ladders, they heard two more explosions – louder than anything they had ever heard. It was the two tunnel mines either side of La Boisselle, and within two minutes they were crossing no-man's land towards the huge craters that had been created.

Before they had got 100 metres, though, the Germans began scything them down. Forewarned by the intercepted message, they'd moved their all-important machine-gun defences from Y-Sap, distributing them throughout their line. As soon as the bombardment had ceased, they'd then swarmed back into their trenches just as thousands of British troops walked into their gun sights. By noon, more than 11,000 British soldiers lay dead either side of La Boisselle. The village was supposed to have fallen within 20 minutes, instead it took six days. The Battle of the Somme, meanwhile, raged on for another four months.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE TUNNELLERS?

THE WAR UNDERGROUND WAS INVISIBLE EXCEPT TO THOSE WHO FOUGHT IT, AND ITS HORRORS HAVE REMAINED BURIED FOR DECADES

Working for up to 12 hours a day in tense silence, life was tough and dangerous for the tunnellers. Every day they faced the same hazards underground. The tunnels were freezing and frequently rat infested or flooded. Fatigue, trench foot, and vitamin D deficiency all sapped their strength. The risk of cave-ins was ever present, as was the danger from asphyxiation or explosions caused by underground gasses.

Then there was the threat of the Germans. Always listening, always waiting, maybe just on the other side of a slender wall of earth, to kill them. If tunnels collided, it meant cramped, candle-lit combat with knives, knuckle-dusters and bludgeons. If they didn't, the enemy had explosives. Once a tunnel was detected, a hole was silently drilled towards it, a steel tube called a camouflet packed with explosive inserted, and detonated. Those on the other side then either became trapped, or drowned in mud.

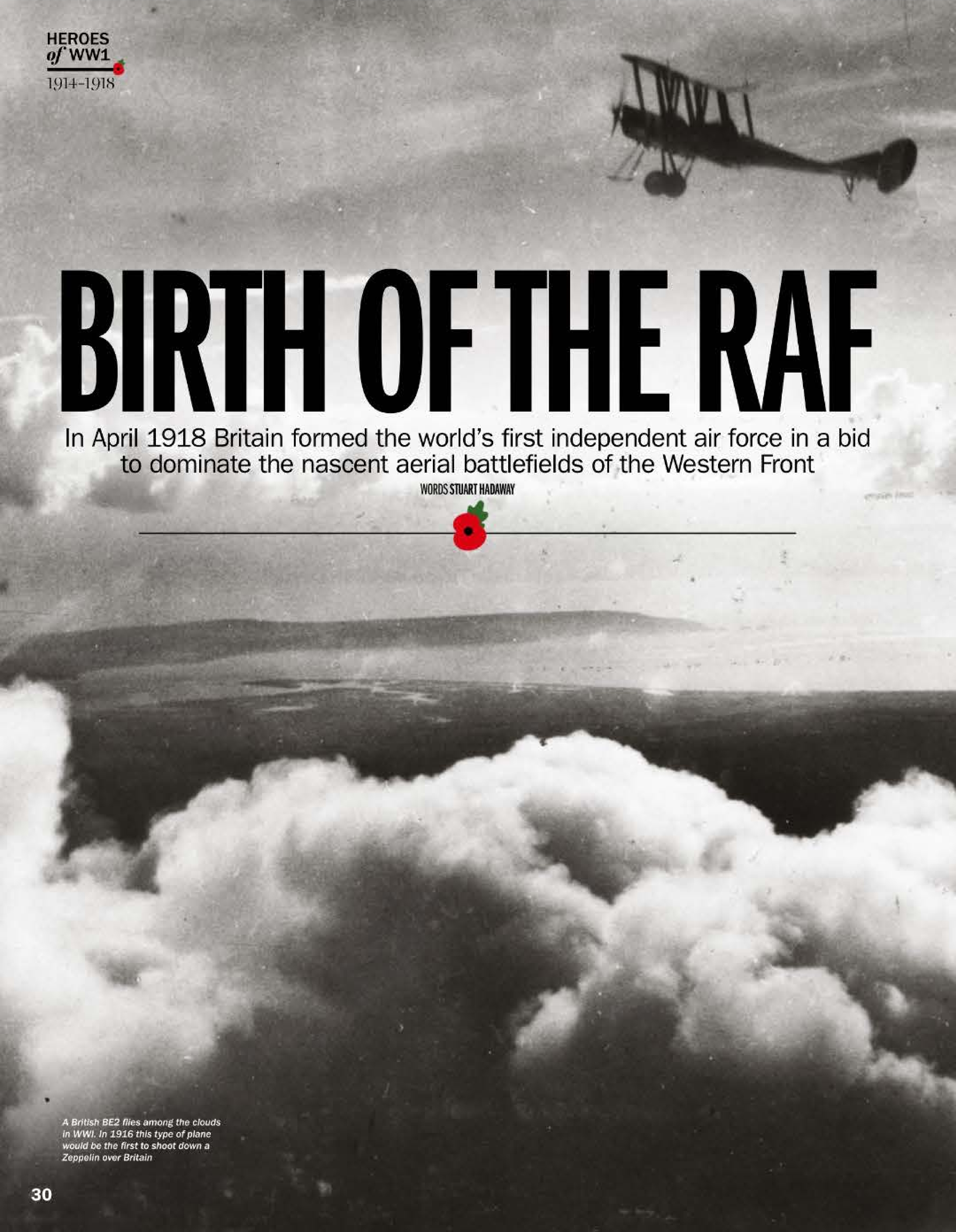
When the war became more mobile from 1917 onwards, the tunnellers were moved above ground to more mundane tasks. And when the war ended, those that had survived were packed off home to their pits and their sewers, while those that didn't remained, entombed forever in the deadly labyrinths they had painstakingly dug below the Western Front.

"IF TUNNELS COLLIDED, IT MEANT CRAMPED, CANDLE-LIT COMBAT WITH KNUCKLE-DUSTERS AND BLUDGEONS"



Sanctuary Wood museum in Ypres, Belgium, where the terrifying world of the tunnels has been preserved

Images: Alamy, Corbis, Mary Evans



BIRTH OF THE RAF

In April 1918 Britain formed the world's first independent air force in a bid to dominate the nascent aerial battlefields of the Western Front

WORDS **STUART HADAWAY**

A British BE2 flies among the clouds in WWI. In 1916 this type of plane would be the first to shoot down a Zeppelin over Britain



The formation of the RAF was the culmination of issues and problems dating back to 1912, but the major catalyst for change was the start of a new German strategic bombing campaign against Britain in May 1917. The Germans had been using airships – popularly known as 'Zeppelins' regardless of actual manufacturer – to raid Britain since January 1915. These raids had been small-scale affairs, with a handful of ships acting largely independently to attack targets over a wide area. Target location and aiming were rudimentary, and bomb loads were small, so in military and material terms they had caused few casualties and little damage. However, they made a serious impact on public morale.

For a thousand years, it was commonly said, Britain had been safely defended from any foreign attack by the English Channel. Louis Blériot's crossing of the Channel by air in July 1909 had provided a warning, but it was not taken seriously until the coming of the airships. For 20 months the British armed forces (commonly held to be the best in the world) seemed unable to stem the attacks, but this was not a completely fair view. The British were working from scratch to build an unprecedented air defence system.

The Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) had originally followed the traditional role of the Royal Navy in protecting Britain's shores. In February 1916 this changed, and while the RNAS retained responsibility for the seas and coast, the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) took over the inland defences, attacking airships over the UK. However, actually intercepting Zeppelins was difficult. The war on the Western Front was the main focus of RFC activities, and it was as voracious for aeroplanes as it was for men. The RFC struggled to keep up with demands from the front, and only a few outdated aircraft could be spared for home defence.

The BE2c was the most common plane used, and with a ceiling of around 3,000 metres (10,000 feet) it could barely reach the heights habitually used by the Zeppelins. It was not just the height that was a factor, but also time. It took a BE2c over 45 minutes to reach that altitude. A pilot could take off with a definite fix on the Zeppelin's position, but he could not communicate with the ground. After take-off, he would have no idea where in the night sky the enemy was unless the airship were picked up by searchlights.

"FOR A THOUSAND YEARS, IT WAS COMMONLY SAID, BRITAIN HAD BEEN SAFELY DEFENDED FROM ANY FOREIGN ATTACK BY THE ENGLISH CHANNEL"



"WIRELESS INTERCEPTS COULD LET THE BRITISH KNOW WHEN AN ENEMY WAS TAKING OFF FROM ITS BASE, AS IT TESTED ITS OWN WIRELESS EQUIPMENT"

An artist's depiction of the moment Lieutenant Leefe Robinson shot down the first Zeppelin over the UK



Right: The RE.8 is often seen as an example of the lacklustre designs produced by the Royal Aircraft Factory

This drawback – the inability to provide real-time information to the pilot – was perhaps the biggest problem faced by the defence squadrons. Radar, of course, would have been very useful, but within the technical limitations of the day, by the summer of 1916 the air defence system had become remarkably sophisticated. Wireless intercepts could let the British know when an enemy was taking off from its base, as it tested its own wireless equipment. Any subsequent transmissions by the raider, asking for a navigation fix for example, would also be picked up and plotted. This would warn the defenders that a raid was coming, and possibly its size, but would not identify a target to help them concentrate their forces. In some areas of the coast, acoustic receivers ('sound mirrors') listened for the drone of approaching engines, but this technology was highly unreliable.

Once the aircraft were over land, they would be picked up by the extensive observer organisation that was spread across the country. Police and also railway staff backed up dedicated observer posts manned by soldiers. It may seem incongruous, but the railways formed a dense network across the country and, crucially, were well connected with both telegraph and telephone lines.

Observations would be passed rapidly to sector operations rooms, then copied back to London. Positions were plotted on gridded maps, eventually using coloured markers that corresponded to coloured segments on a clock, each colour a five-minute period. The age of the plot could then be instantly discerned, and those older than ten minutes removed. These techniques and organisations would be resurrected in the late 1930s and formed a pillar of the air defence system during the Battle of Britain.

From the operations room, requests for action could be sent to the HQs commanding the different defence elements. Apart from aeroplanes, there were two lines of anti-aircraft (AA) guns around London at eight kilometres (five miles) and 14 kilometres (nine miles) from the city centre, supported by a screen of search lights and balloon barrages. The system constantly evolved and improved, as did the

Lieutenant William Leefe Robinson was the first man to shoot down a Zeppelin over mainland Britain



DEFENCE IN DISARRAY

With the royal navy and RFC acting almost independently, Britain's defences were in dire need of coordination and restructuring

Some of the delays experienced during the air raids of WWI were the result of the wasteful and chaotic state of Britain's aircraft (and perhaps more importantly engine) procurement system. The RFC had been established in 1912 with a military wing, a naval wing, the Central Flying School, and the civilian Royal Aircraft Factory. All orders for new aircraft, as well as the testing and evaluation of new types, were supposed to go through the Factory. However, the Royal Navy rapidly went its own way, working directly with Britain's tiny aircraft industry to develop their own machines. By 1914 the navy had attained complete independence, and the naval wing of the RFC had become the RNAS.

Although the Factory would produce some excellent aircraft, it also worked slowly, and many felt it was stifling innovation. This became a serious issue as the Germans began to win air superiority in 1915 during the 'Fokker Scourge' and the RFC was left behind in technological terms. It would happen again in the spring of 1917, and while this time German superiority was also due to their own tactics and poor British training, the fact that large parts of the RFC were still flying essentially the same aircraft they had since 1914 was nothing short of scandalous.

The Royal Aircraft Factory tended to be the scapegoat for these failings but, while true to an extent, other factors are also to be blamed. Britain's aircraft and engine industries were small and struggled to expand to keep up with demand. The Factory and the RNAS were often in direct competition to secure the limited output of the factories. Particularly for engines, the British often had to look abroad to make up their shortfalls, and in France representatives of the RFC and the RNAS were in direct bidding wars against each other and the French air services for the output of manufacturers there.

Several attempts had been made to bring coordination and efficiency to the system with a series of advisory committees, but they had no executive powers. These failed to have any effect, with the Admiralty in particular refusing to co-operate. By the end of 1916 the two services had 9,400 aircraft of 76 different types on order, plus 20,000 engines of nearly 60 types. Even as the issue continued to have serious operational repercussions, it took a judicial inquiry and firm action by the prime minister to rectify the situation. In December 1916 a new Air Board was created with the official weight of a ministry, and the president of the Air Board (Lord Cowdray from January until November 1917) was given the status of a minister.

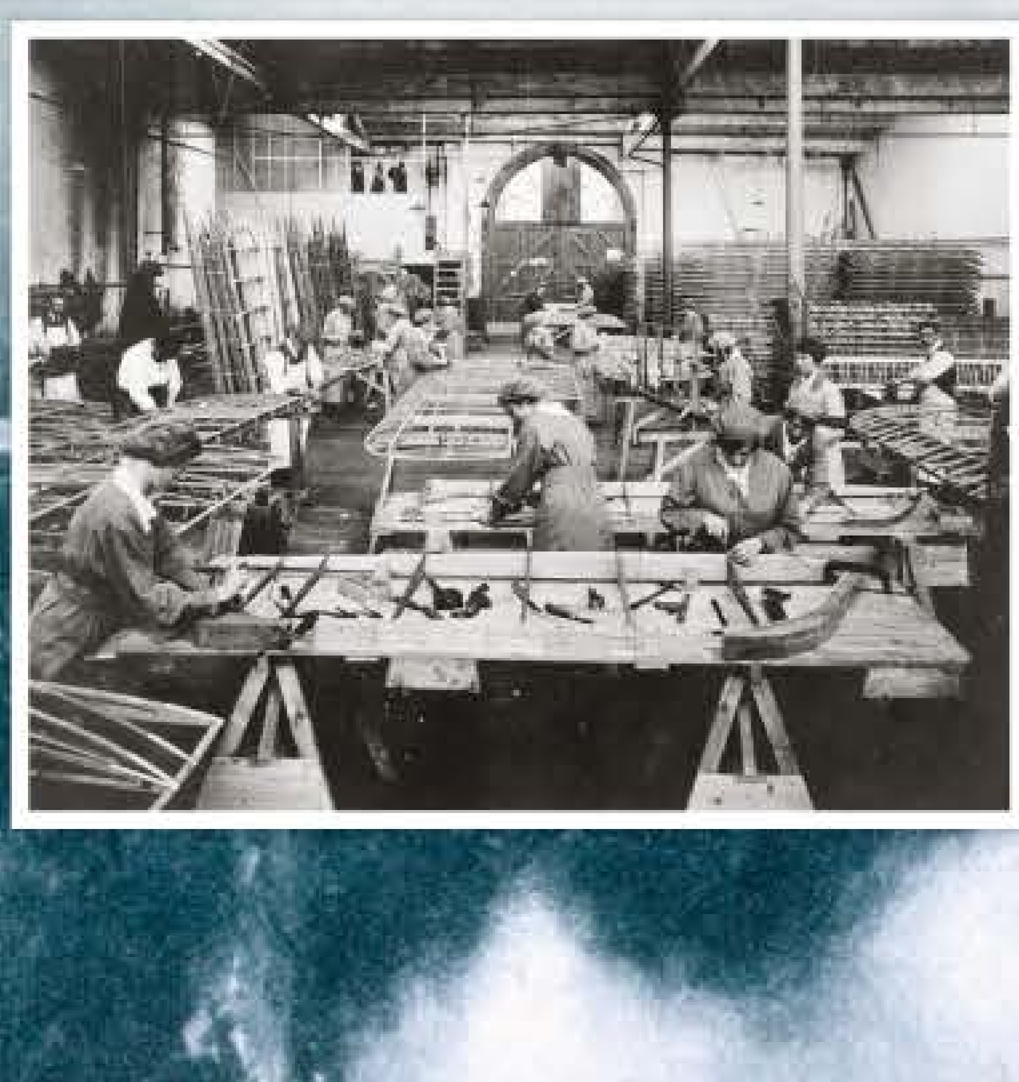
The Air Board was given control over the design of aeroplanes, the numbers and types ordered, and the allocation of aircraft to each service. The Ministry of Munitions had control of actual manufacturing and the inspection of finished aircraft, and took over management of the Royal Aircraft Factory. Although the Air Board controlled allocation, this was only in broad terms. They had no influence over how those aircraft were used, and Cowdray's desire to build a strategic bombing force was ignored by both the RFC and the RNAS.

The new organisation would have a very real effect on the war in the air as it entered a critical phase. The first four months of 1917 saw the RFC taking increasingly high casualties on the Western Front, culminating in 'Bloody April' when over 250 aircraft were lost. The RFC was attempting to expand and modernise but could not do so while facing such losses. In April 1917 new aircraft types like the SE5a and the Bristol F.2B Fighter began entering frontline service, and from May losses dropped and strength increased. By taking a firm grasp of the production and supply systems, deliveries of aircraft more than doubled from 6,633 in 1916 to 14,832 in 1917, and again in 1918 to 30,782. In June 1917 the War Cabinet approved an expansion of the RFC from 108 to 200 squadrons, and an increase in the RNAS, with confidence that this target could be met. This total was to include a strategic force of ten long-range bomber squadrons, the number which was increased to 50 squadrons in August as calls began for reprisal raids against Germany.

German and British aircraft engage on the Western Front. British planes struggled at several stages of the war against the often-superior technology and tactics of the Germans

"THE FIRST FOUR MONTHS OF 1917 SAW THE RFC TAKING INCREASINGLY HIGH CASUALTIES ON THE WESTERN FRONT, CULMINATING IN 'BLOODY APRIL' WHEN OVER 250 AIRCRAFT WERE LOST"

A British aircraft factory. It took years for Britain's aircraft industry to grow to adequate levels, with the right equipment and properly trained staff



Lord Cowdray was president of the Air Board from January to November 1917



technology. AA guns, for example, were initially simply field pieces pointed upwards, but were gradually improved with special ammunition, better range-finders, improved sights that allowed for deflection, and faster rates of fire.

It took until the end of 1916, but the Zeppelin threat was eventually defeated. After this, operational realities came into play. The Royal Navy desperately needed small, quick-firing guns to arm the merchant ships that were suffering serious losses from German submarines. Indeed, the Germans were very close to winning this First Battle of the Atlantic, and in the winter of 1916 many guns were withdrawn from the air defences for this use. This reduced the number of personnel needed to man the AA cordon. These trained artillerymen were sent to France, where they were badly needed. Pilots were also desperately needed on the Western Front, and while the Home Defence squadrons were already committed to sending nine experienced pilots per month to France (to be replaced by newly qualified men), in March the transfer of an additional 36 men was approved. As it was, the 11 Home Defence squadrons (four dedicated specifically to London) only managed to muster just over 50 serviceable machines against their authorised strength of 96 aircraft. However, with the Zeppelins gone, the Western Front was the priority, as the focus turned to winning the war instead of defending the city.

"ON 13 JUNE THE FIRST DAYLIGHT RAID ON LONDON WAS MADE. SOME 162 PEOPLE WERE KILLED, INCLUDING 18 CHILDREN FROM THE UPPER NORTH STREET PRIMARY SCHOOL IN POPLAR, AND 432 WERE WOUNDED"

Then, in May 1917, this relieved sense of security was abruptly and dramatically shattered. The Zeppelins had previously operated alone or in tiny groups, striking almost blind at night, scattering handfuls of bombs across wide areas, but on 25 May 1917 a formation of 23 German aeroplanes from Kampfgeschwader 3 appeared in close formation and in broad daylight, approaching London. Although poor weather forced them away from the capital, the raid diverted south and dropped bombs, causing heavy civilian



A Handley Page V/1500 four-engine bomber. Just entering service in November 1918, it was designed to bomb Berlin

losses in Kent, especially Folkestone. The shock, so soon after the relief of the victory over the Zeppelins, forced the government to act. As the raids, carried out mostly by Gotha G.IV twin engine heavy bombers and supported by a few massive four-engine Zeppelin-Staaken Riesenflugzeuge 'Giants' continued, the military once again seemed powerless to stop them.

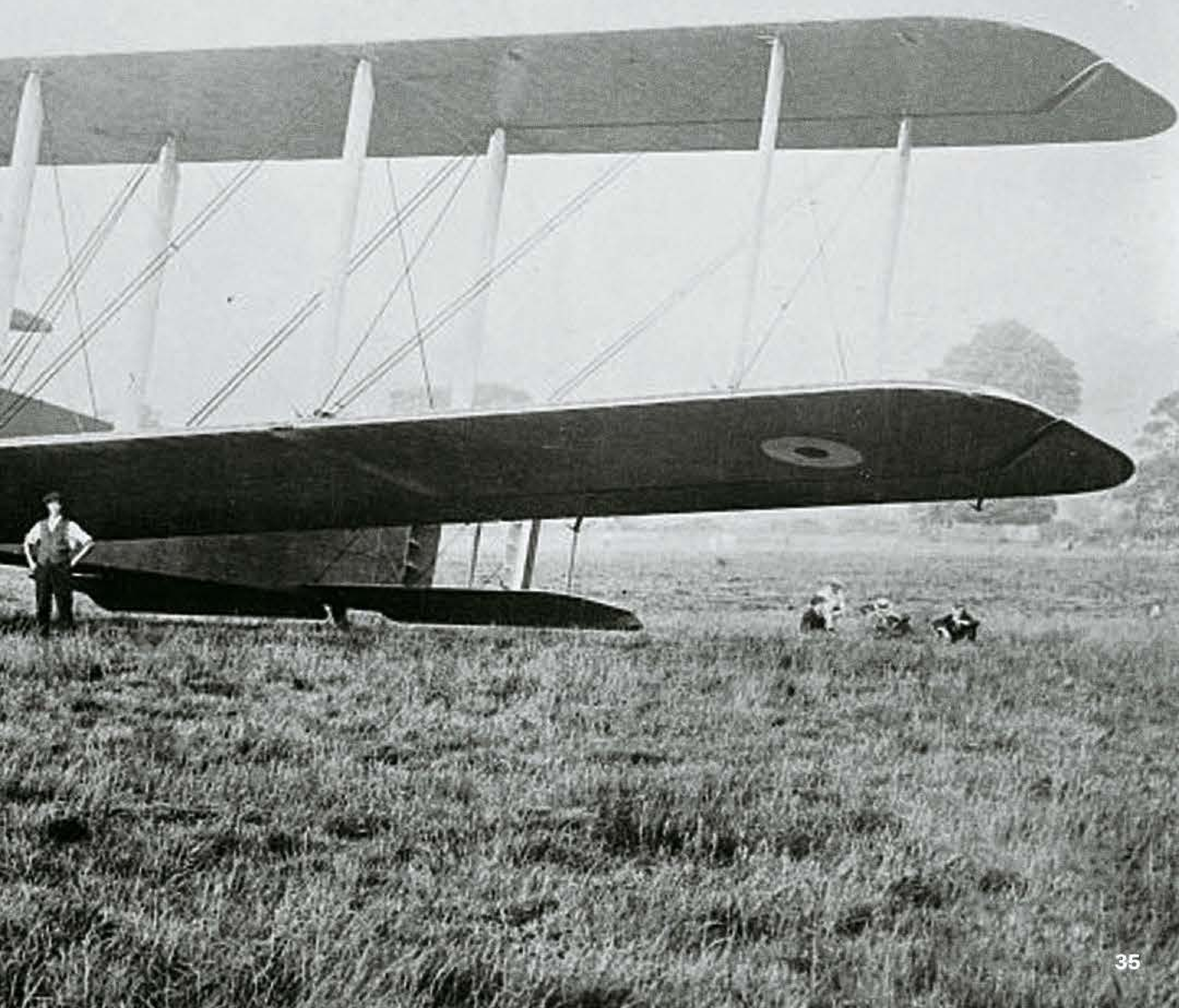
Two more Gotha raids and a Zeppelin raid followed in June. On 13 June the first daylight raid on London was made. Some 162 people were killed, including 18 children from the Upper North Street Primary School in Poplar, and 432 were wounded. The British were unable to bring down a single enemy aircraft.

After a long pause (apart from a raid on Harwich) the Gothas returned on 7 July, and 21 aircraft dropped 81 bombs in central London. Some 79 aircraft (of 20 different types) were scrambled by the RFC, and another 22 by the RNAS. Two British aircraft were lost, although one Gotha was bought down over the sea. Another four crashed, due to various reasons, near their bases. A total of 54 people were killed in the raid and 190 wounded.

"IN MAY 1917, THIS RELIEVED SENSE OF SECURITY WAS ABRUPTLY AND DRAMATICALLY SHATTERED"

The apparent inability to stop these raids had several immediate effects, including King George V changing the Royal family's surname from 'Saxe-Coburg-Gotha' to 'Windsor'. More importantly, on 11 July 1917, Prime Minister David Lloyd George appointed the South African General Jan Smuts to establish the Committee on Air Organisation and Home Defence Against Air Raids. The Committee presented two reports, on 19 July and 17 August 1917. The first of these recommended a range of reforms to improve Britain's air defences. Primarily, Smuts called for better co-ordination of the home defences.

While the air defences may have been advanced and sophisticated, they were sadly disjointed. The RNAS aircraft around the coast worked in conjunction with HQ Home Defence, but they were still under independent, Admiralty control. The observer networks and the AA guns separately came under Lord French, the field marshal commanding Home Defence, as did the RFC's Home Defence Brigade. Therefore, three of the four key elements reported to Lord French, but there was no formal connection between them anywhere lower than this highest of levels. Any attempts to co-ordinate actions had to go all the way up through the different levels



THE FIRST GOTHA RAID

The raid on 25 May 1917 showed many of the strengths as well as the weaknesses of both Britain's air defences and of the German bombers

The German aircraft were first spotted at 4.45pm by a light ship in the North Sea and reported to the Admiralty. At 4.55pm the Admiralty was scrambling aeroplanes from Manston and seaplanes from Felixstowe and Westgate to intercept them. At 5pm the warning arrived at the War Office, and by 5.15pm the AA guns were on alert (and some were already opening fire as the Gothas started to cross the coast). Some 33 RFC aircraft had been scrambled.

At around 5.30pm the 21 Gothas encountered low cloud over London and diverted south. The cloud also obscured the view from the ground, and the defenders lost track of the raid. Flying in two distinct formations, the Gothas flew south, dropping sporadic bombs on north Kent, while the RFC struggled to reach altitude behind them. The Gothas, flying at over 4,300 metres (14,000 feet), were well above the ceiling of most of the aircraft sent up to find them, which were now searching in vain over London. Only one RFC aircraft, a DH5 being ferried to France, encountered and engaged the enemy, and was beaten off with damage. At 6pm the Gothas dropped bombs on Ashford, and at 6.15pm on Hythe and Saltwood on the south Kent coast, where extensive barracks and training facilities existed. Several civilians were killed or injured. At 6.20pm the Gothas were over the barracks at Shorncliffe Camp, and 16 Canadian soldiers were killed and another 94 injured by bombs. A few minutes later bombs started to drop across Folkestone, a major cross-Channel port, and a single 50-kilogram (110-pound) bomb landed in Tontine Street, behind the harbour. The narrow street was packed with shoppers, with a long queue outside a grocer's after receiving a delivery of potatoes. The blast killed 33 men, women and children, and injured many more. One Canadian sergeant, recovering from a wound received at Vimy Ridge, recalled, "The whole of the street seemed to explode. There was smoke and flames all over, but worst of all were the screams of the wounded and dying and mothers looking frantically for their kids."

In all, 94 people were killed (17 of them soldiers) and 197 injured (102 of them soldiers). Further RNAS aircraft scrambled from Dunkirk intercepted the raiders, and brought one down over the Channel.

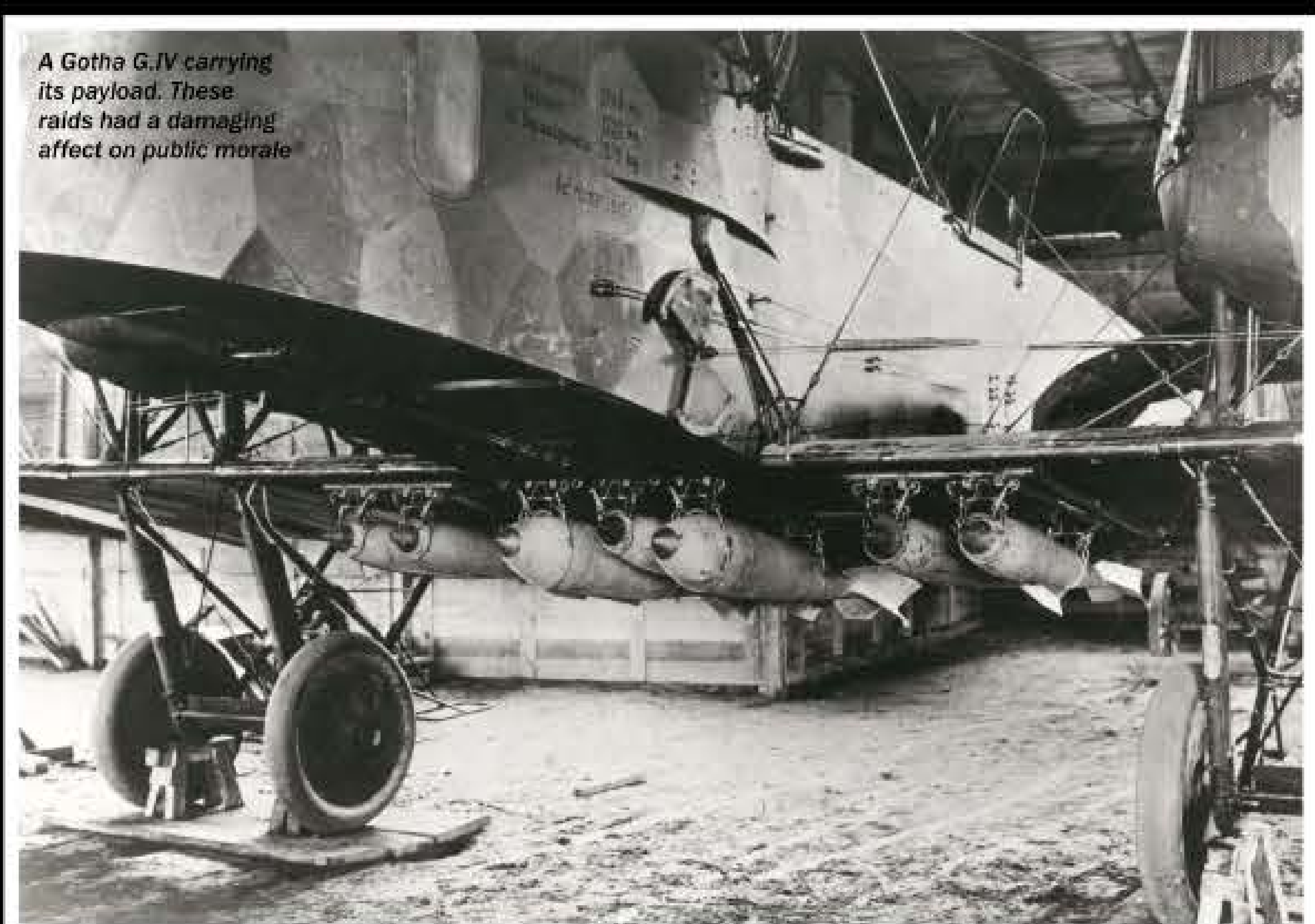
Initially at least, the command and control network had performed well during the raid, spreading the alert and activating the defences rapidly. However, the defences themselves were woefully lacking.



A Gotha G.IV approaches London



A Gotha G.IV prepares for a raid



A Gotha G.IV carrying its payload. These raids had a damaging affect on public morale

of command to the top, and then back down again, costing time.

Smuts recommended that a joint headquarters immediately be set up at a lower level, to afford quicker communications and "the unity of command which is essential to any warlike operation". Within weeks, the London Air Defence Area (LADA) was formed to co-ordinate all of the city's defences. Smuts also recommended that the RFC's Home Defence squadrons be properly constituted as permanent units and equipped with modern aircraft, rather than their current use as de facto reserve units only able to launch smaller numbers of obsolete aircraft. As he saw it, the answer to the bomber threat was properly co-ordinated attacks by formations of fighters. AA defences were also to be strengthened. For both the aircraft and the guns, reinforcement would take time as new equipment was manufactured and personnel trained.

The Gothas made three more raids in August 1917, all aimed at east Kent ports. Although one was abandoned because of poor weather, 18 Gothas were lost, four to British aircraft, one to AA guns, and the rest to accidents or Dutch air defences. Britain's defences were stiffening, and the Germans switched to night raids in September. The Gothas now suffered the problems of flying and navigating by night, although of course it also hindered attempts to intercept them. However, the balloon barrages that were strung across the approaches to London were more effective at night, while the reinforced AA batteries were adopting barrage techniques, putting up walls of fire at certain points to discourage the enemy and force them to turn back, rather than engaging single aircraft. The areas around London were divided into strict zones for AA guns, balloons, and aircraft, creating a layered defence and reducing the risks of British fighters falling foul of the ground-based defences.

Further Gotha and Giant raids continued until the last, and largest on the night of 19-20 May 1918, known as the 'Whitsun Raid'. This involved 38 Gothas and three Giants. Only 18 of them managed to penetrate the LADA, dropping 72 bombs. Most were discouraged by the barrage of AA fire – some 30,000 shells were fired – while the (by then) Royal Air Force launched 88 sorties to intercept the bombers. Two enemy aircraft were shot down by AA fire and three by night fighters.

"THE DAY MAY NOT BE FAR OFF WHEN AERIAL OPERATIONS WITH THEIR DEVASTATION OF ENEMY LANDS AND DESTRUCTION OF INDUSTRIAL AND POPULOUS CENTRES ON A VAST SCALE MAY BECOME THE PRINCIPLE OPERATIONS OF WAR"

– General Jan Smuts



Policemen in London prepare to warn the p that an air raid is coming

"AA BATTERIES WERE ADOPTING BARRAGE TECHNIQUES, PUTTING UP WALLS OF FIRE AT CERTAIN POINTS TO DISCOURAGE THE ENEMY AND FORCE THEM TO TURN BACK"

In all, the German aeroplane raids caused 837 deaths (486 in London) and 1,991 injuries (1,432 in London) during their 12-month campaign. 16 British aircraft were lost, while 24 Gothas were shot down by British defences, and 36 more (plus two Giants) were lost because of accidents.

While Smut's first report was successfully overhauling the Home Defence organisation, on 17 August 1917 he presented his second report. This examined the use of and co-ordination between the flying services and, doubtless encouraged by the success of the new Air Board, he concluded that they should be merged into an independent air arm, supported by an Air Ministry. Heavily influenced by the Gotha raids, Smuts enthused that "the day may not be far off when aerial operations with their devastation of enemy lands and destruction of industrial and populous centres on a vast scale may become the principle operations of war, to which the older forms of military and naval operations may become secondary and subordinated". He wanted to develop a strategic bombing force to this end – a call that was also being echoed across the country as the public clamoured for retaliatory raids on German towns.

The report was quickly, but secretly, acted on, and the many administrative and practical issues surrounding the creation of a new fighting service began to be tackled. Even so, the Cabinet continued to debate the issue. Many of the senior figures brought into the discussion, including Lord Cowdray and General Sir Hugh Trenchard, commander of the RFC in France, thought any such move should wait until after the war, while Smuts and General Sir David Henderson, general officer commanding the



Right: An early air raid warning poster



The Sopwith Triplane was an excellent aircraft but only saw limited use with the RNAS, due to the chaotic state of aircraft procurement



Graves of Canadian soldiers killed in the raid on 25 May 1917, in Shorncliffe Military Cemetery

RFC and director general of military aeronautics, wanted it done as soon as possible. In the end, the latter party won, and on 6 November 1917 Cabinet passed the draft Air Force Act, which was duly passed by Parliament and signed by the king by the end of the month. On 1 April 1918 the Royal Air Force would come into existence. In the meantime, an Aerial Operations Committee was established to look at the logistics behind building a strategic bomber fleet. In early October it was renamed the War Priorities Committee, with wide-ranging authority over munitions production, such was the perceived importance of developing a strategic bombing force.

There was now much to do. At a senior level, new staff and a ministry had to be properly established, although this proved highly problematic. Lord Cowdray resigned in umbrage at being very publicly passed over to be the first secretary of state for air, a job that went to Lord Rothermere instead. Rothermere was a press baron who did not transition well into politics. He hated having his actions debated or questioned, and often acted without consulting his senior staff. Trenchard had been brought back from France to be the first chief of the Air Staff (CAS), but on 13 April 1918 he resigned due to incompatibility with Rothermere. Henderson also resigned from the Air Council,





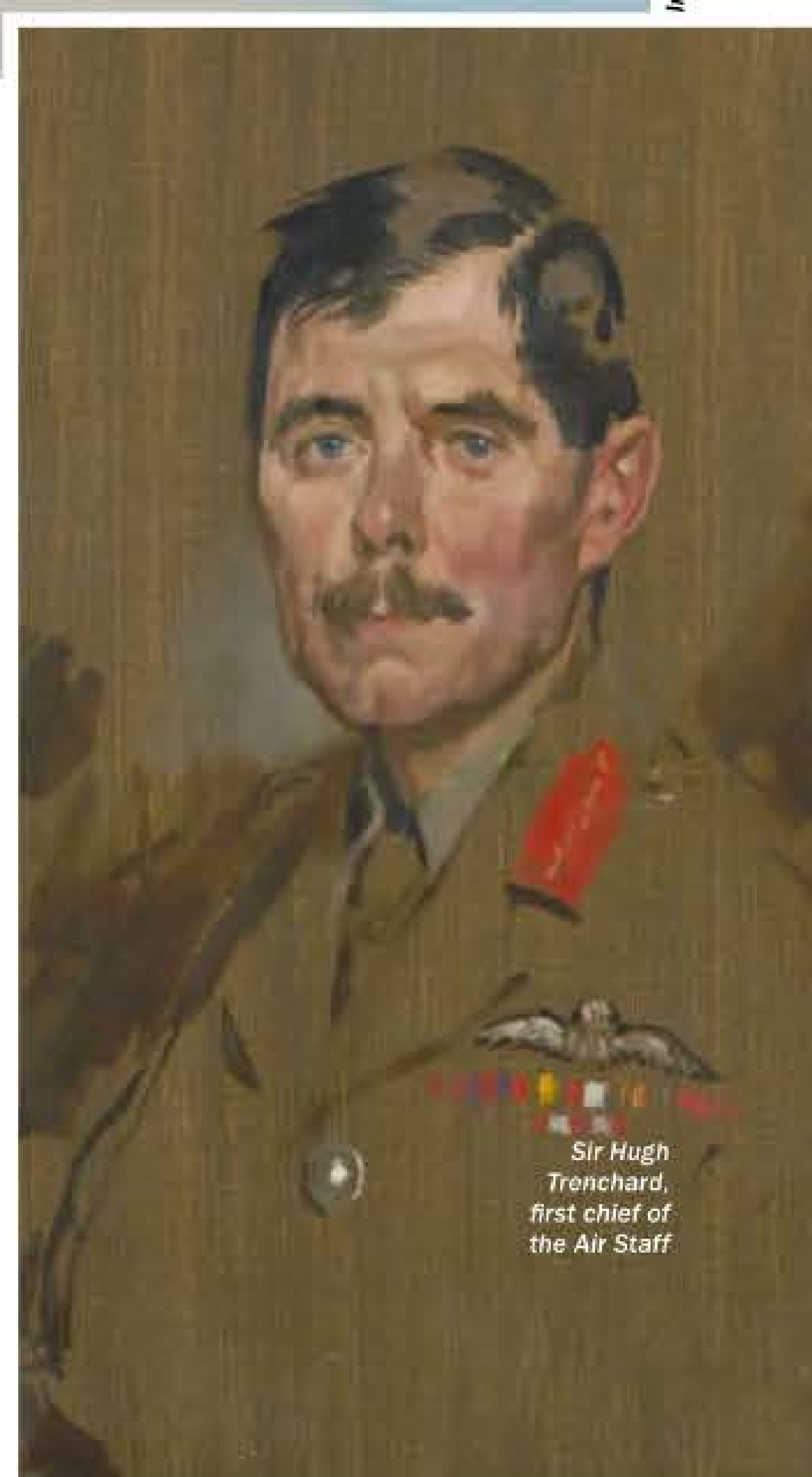
Images: Alamy, Getty, Stuart Hadaway

"THE RAF SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED ITS TRANSITION WITH THE MINIMUM OF IMPACT ON THE FIGHTING FRONTS. INDEED, THE NEW, BETTER CO-ORDINATED SYSTEM SOON SHOWED ITS ADVANTAGES"

and by the end of April Rothermere himself had resigned. It was an uninspiring start. Rothermere was replaced by Sir William Weir, who made a success of the job, while Sir Frederick Sykes, who had been the original commander of the military wing of the RFC in 1912, became the new CAS. Trenchard would eventually return to France to command the Independent Force of strategic bombers.

There were many administrative questions to answer over rank structures, uniforms and organisation. For these, the new RAF took a very pragmatic approach. Beyond bringing the old RNAS units more in line with the former RFC, most of these questions were given a lower priority, and the focus remained on the operational performance of the new service. With 137 squadrons (plus some flights) spread across the world from the UK to India, and even North America if you included training units, the RAF successfully completed its transition with the minimum of impact on the fighting fronts. Indeed, the new, better coordinated system soon showed its advantages, and within ten weeks, the RAF was able to activate the Independent Force to start a bombing campaign over Germany. A dividend of both the better procurement system and the ability of the new service to expand away from the tactical focus of the army, the force would inflict small but serious damage on German production, as well as strike a blow against enemy morale. Across all of the fighting fronts, the RAF continued to expand with newer and better aircraft, and the number of active squadrons increased by 30 per cent in just eight months.

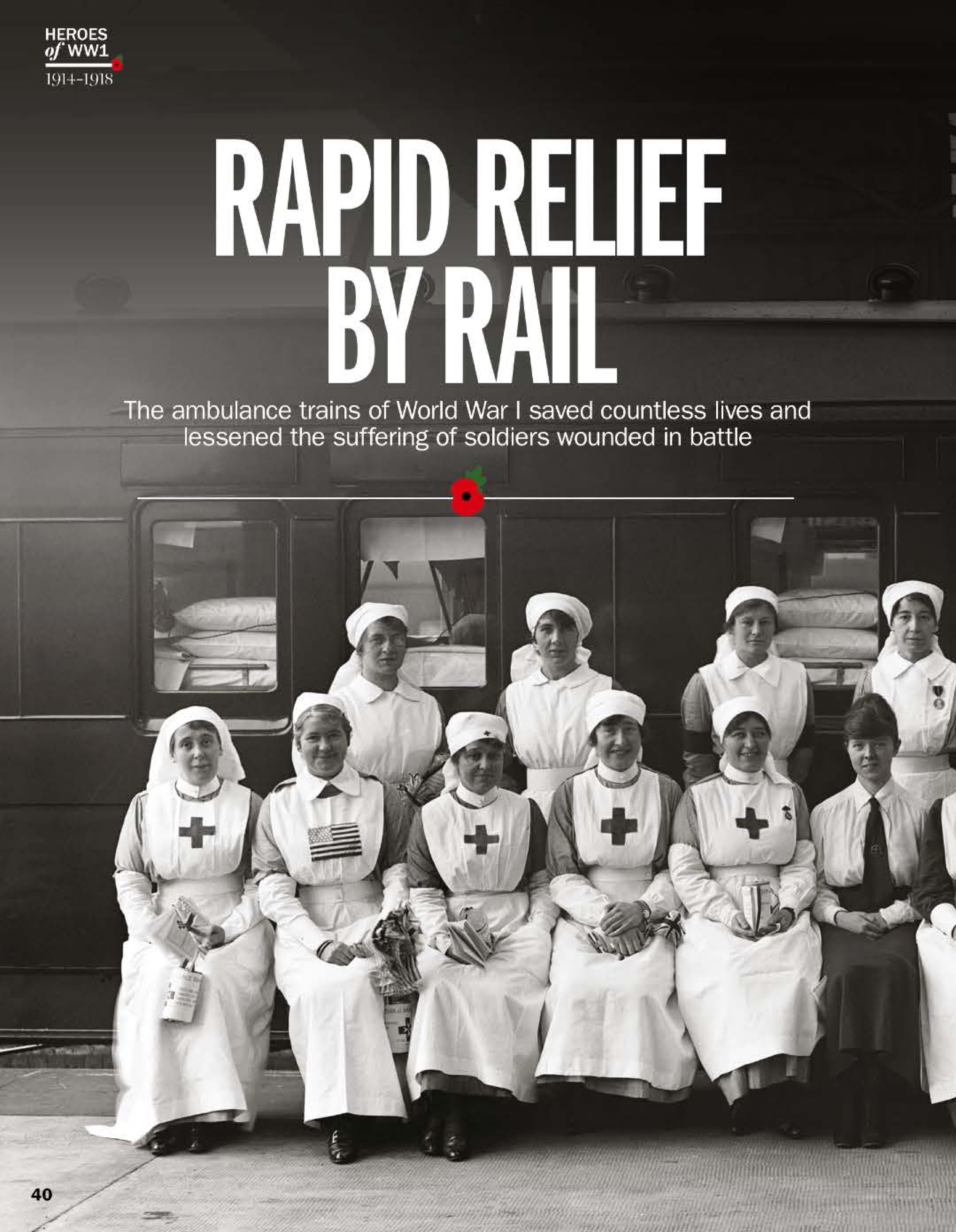
In some areas the RAF found new freedom to offer ideas and innovations without being shackled to the army's preconceptions. In Palestine, for example, the RAF was able to offer an air plan for the final British offensive in September 1918 that would have a shattering effect on the Ottoman forces opposing them. In a few short months, the RAF was able to demonstrate the formidable potential of air power in war.



Sir Hugh Trenchard, first chief of the Air Staff

RAPID RELIEF BY RAIL

The ambulance trains of World War I saved countless lives and lessened the suffering of soldiers wounded in battle



It was the bloodiest day in the history of the British Army. On 1 July 1916 the Battle of the Somme commenced. Before the sun set, 57,470 soldiers became casualties, and 19,240 of them were dead.

During that horrific day and the three that followed, ambulance trains completed 63 treacherous round trips from stations where wounded men lay awaiting evacuation to port cities on the coast of France. The trains brought 33,392 casualties from the combat zone. The immense carnage at the Somme required the trains to carry wounded well beyond their designated capacity. For example, Train No. 29 transported 761 men while fighting raged on 2 July – more than twice its allotted load.

By the time of the Battle of the Somme, it was terribly apparent to soldier and civilian, field marshal and private alike, that World War I had brought death, injury and destruction on such a scale that had previously been impossible to conceive. Without the yeoman service of the ambulance trains, staffed by tireless medical personnel of the Royal Army Medical Corps and Queen Alexandra's Imperial Medical Nursing Service – including doctors, nurses, orderlies and other personnel – the fearful harvest of death reaped in the Great War would doubtless have been substantially higher.

Although the concept of the ambulance train had been tried and proven effective in the 19th century in the Crimea, American Civil War, the Zulu and Boer Wars, it was the modern combat of the 20th century – facilitated by the machine gun, bolt-action rifle, heavy-calibre artillery and dreaded poison gas – that brought its lifesaving capabilities further to the attention of both the military and the public. Throughout the war of 1914-18, Britain, France and Germany operated ambulance trains, often painted white with the Red Cross emblazoned on their cars for easy recognition, and their contribution was apparent from early in the conflict. In the month of December 1914 alone, more than 100,000 British casualties were evacuated aboard trains from battlefields in Flanders.

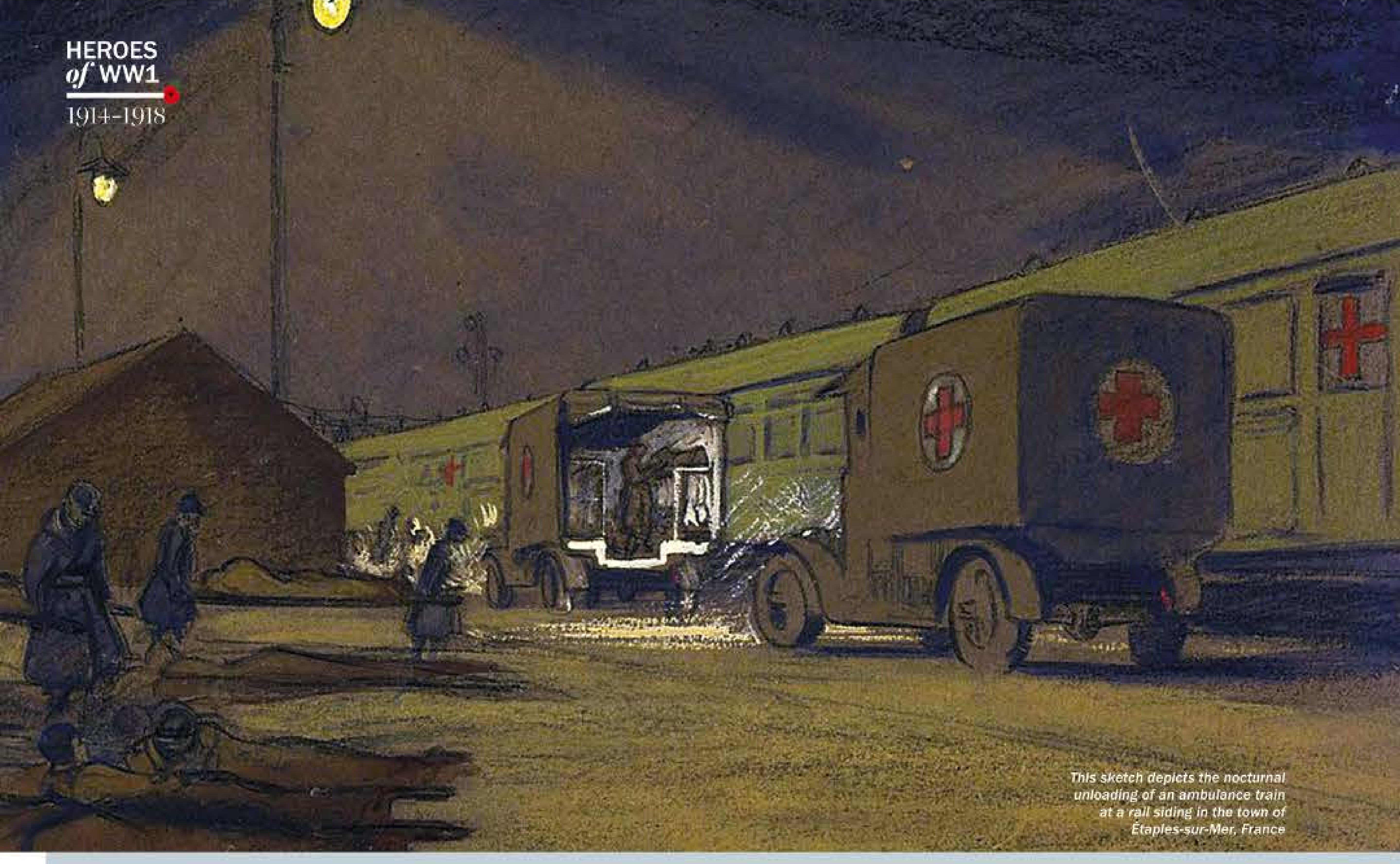
The dark clouds of conflict had gathered for some time prior to the outbreak of the war, and two years before the first weapon was fired, the British government, anticipating tremendous numbers of wounded, authorised the formation of the Railway Executive Committee with responsibilities for the wartime operation of the nation's railways. Within the scope of the committee's charge came the efficient transportation of the wounded that arrived in Britain from battlefields on the European continent. To that end, plans were produced for a dozen hospital trains to operate exclusively in Britain. By the end of 1914, however, when the French were unable to provide adequate locomotives and rolling stock for both the British and French armies, the role of the Railway Executive Committee expanded to provide ambulance trains for use on the continent as well.

"IN THE MONTH OF DECEMBER 1914 ALONE, MORE THAN 100,000 BRITISH CASUALTIES WERE EVACUATED ABOARD TRAINS FROM BATTLEFIELDS IN FLANDERS"

Days after Britain entered the war, three locomotives and numerous rail cars were presented to the Royal Army Medical Corps. These were refitted with surgical dressing rooms, patient wards and dispensaries, and were designated British Ambulance Trains 1, 2, and 3. Meanwhile, skilled railway workers were dedicated to the production of ambulance trains, the first of which arrived at Southampton just 20 days after Britain entered the war in August 1914. Built by companies such as the London and South Western Railway, Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway, and Great Western and Eastern Railways, 20 ambulance trains were operating in Britain and 31 in France by the end of the war. As



A group of nurses in front of an ambulance train, before being sent to France in 1917. There were 51 ambulance trains in service, run by dedicated doctors, nurses and orderlies



This sketch depicts the nocturnal unloading of an ambulance train at a rail siding in the town of Étaples-sur-Mer, France

early as 1915, 12 trains had been shipped to the continent and entered service, the most recent of them becoming the first train equipped with purpose-built operating suites to allow surgery to be performed.

As the country mobilised, members of the United Kingdom Flour Millers' Association presented two ambulance trains to the Red Cross. Working cooperatively with a French train, the trio carried 461,844 wounded men from 1915 to the end of the war. Donations and private funds regularly supported the effort to build more ambulance trains. Dolls dressed in nursing uniforms were sold on station platforms to solicit funds.

The ambulance trains themselves were marvels of ingenuity and the utilisation of available space. A typical train consisted of the locomotive and 15 to 20 carriages, including a dispensary car, two kitchens, a personnel car and a brake and storage van, or caboose. As casualties mounted and the demand for ambulance trains increased during the course of the war, designs were modified and improved. The trains might stretch half a kilometre (0.3 miles) along the track. A medical officer, usually with the rank of major, was in charge of the activities of two additional doctors – usually lieutenants – three or four nurses and a complement of 40 orderlies, who cared for a large number of wounded aboard a single train. Designed to carry 400 patients, it was not uncommon for more than 500 to be loaded aboard.

The patient cars were outfitted with berths anchored to the walls on two or three levels, accommodating up to 36 patients each. Some trains were equipped with berths that could

"IT WAS THE FIRST TASTE OF HOME THAT MANY OF THE MEN, SCARRED PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY BY THEIR EXPERIENCES IN THE TRENCHES, WOULD SAVOUR"

be raised and lowered, allowing patients who were slightly wounded and able to sit up to enjoy conversation, a cigarette and even a cup of freshly brewed tea. It was the first taste of home that many of the men, scarred physically and emotionally by their experiences in the trenches, would savour. Trains placed in service later in the conflict were equipped with fans to disperse lethal, lingering gas that had been used indiscriminately in chemical warfare attacks.

Casualties were generally moved through stages of evacuation from the front. Regimental aid posts were located 180-275 metres (200-300 yards) from the lines. Stretcher cases and walking wounded received basic care and were then moved to an advanced dressing station another 365 metres (400 yards) to the rear, or another kilometre and a half (one mile) back to a main dressing station, where lifesaving emergency surgery could be performed on a limited basis. From there, patients were carried by truck or horse-drawn wagon to a field ambulance complex, which included more than 200 personnel, operating tents, ward tents and other necessary facilities. Men were triaged and information on their condition was recorded. The next leg of the evacuation journey took wounded men to the casualty clearing station, several kilometres further to the rear. These expansive facilities covered almost a kilometre of ground, treating as many as 1,000 wounded at a time and providing the most comprehensive medical care available in such close proximity to the fighting.

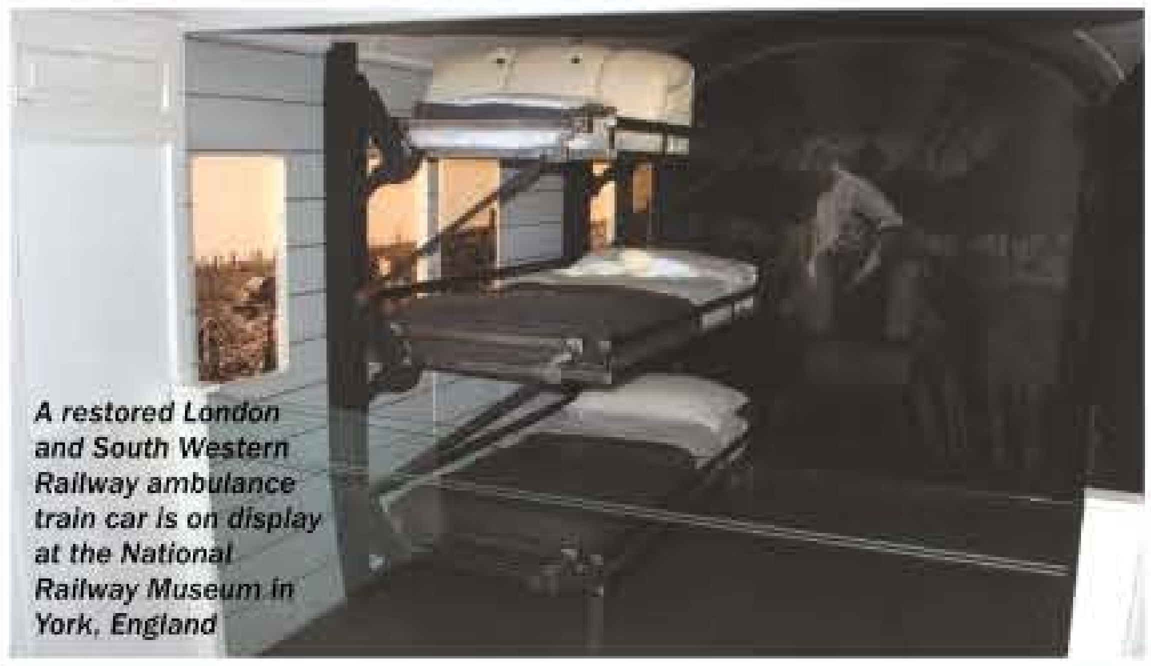
Ambulance trains operating in France transported the wounded from casualty clearing stations near railheads to base hospitals at such port cities as Rouen, Calais and Boulogne – the busiest location on the coast, where thousands of casualties were taken for the eventual cross-channel voyage to Britain. Experienced orderlies in Boulogne became so proficient that they once unloaded 123 patients from a train in only 19 minutes.

Ambulance trains followed established rail lines from the front to the English Channel ports, and the village of Étaples-sur-Mer in the Pas-de-Calais was a beehive of activity. One of the largest Allied hospital complexes in Europe was established there overlooking the picturesque Canche estuary. Even its 20,000-bed capacity was strained, receiving 40,000 sick and wounded in a single month in 1917, delivered by a dozen ambulance trains. Today, the town is the site of an expansive cemetery where 11,500 soldiers of the British Commonwealth are buried.

Although swift evacuation was a hallmark of the railway lifeline, travel was difficult at times, and at least one journey from Braisnes in northern France to Rouen required an arduous three days. For some injured soldiers, boarding the train came as a blessed relief. For



A trio of nurses stand in the operating theatre of an ambulance train rail car during World War I



A restored London and South Western Railway ambulance train car is on display at the National Railway Museum in York, England



A cook and nurse go about their duties in the kitchen car aboard a World War I-era ambulance train

others rail travel was an ordeal in itself. While they were at least in a safer environment and receiving available medical care, the ride was often rough, jostling men with painful wounds or broken bones and adding to their misery. "I remember the journey as a nightmare," one former casualty reflected. "My back was sagging, and I could not raise my knees to relieve the cramp, the bunk above me only a few inches away."

Time was precious, and men continually boarded the trains in soiled uniforms caked with mud, their wounds crudely bandaged and oozing blood. The stench of burned or decaying flesh and other odours was at times overwhelming. Maintaining reasonably sanitary conditions was a constant battle. "They come straight from the trenches," one nurse recalled, "and are awfully happy on the train with the first attempts at comforts they have known. One told me they were just getting their tea one day, relieving the trenches when 'one o' them coal-boxes' sent a 256-lb shell into them, which killed seven and wounded fifteen. One shell! He said he had to help pick them up and it made him sick."

Service aboard an ambulance train on the continent was particularly hazardous. Routinely, the trains approached within 16 kilometres (ten miles) of the front lines to reach casualty clearing stations. When they were in close proximity to ammunition dumps, supply depots or troop concentrations, they often came under fire from enemy artillery and strafing aircraft. One nurse recalled that the concussion of bombs and shells blasted every window out of the 16-car train on which she was serving. An orderly serving in Britain remembered that his train regularly pulled into railway tunnels, taking

"THE STENCH OF BURNED OR DECAYING FLESH AND OTHER ODOURS WAS AT TIMES OVERWHELMING"

shelter against the bombs dropped by German Zeppelins. A jagged shard of shrapnel once crashed through his onboard office.

Early trains did not provide easy access between rail cars, and nurses caring for patients in multiple carriages were obliged to move outside and step over to the adjacent car. It was a hazardous undertaking, particularly while carrying an armload of medicine and supplies. At night a lantern was necessary, compounding the difficulty.

Ambulance train personnel were often stretched beyond the limits of endurance, working around the clock, on their feet for 24 hours at a time as doctors assessed casualties, nurses dressed wounds and comforted patients, and orderlies retrieved water and bandages and cleaned continually. While many of the patients were stabilised before they were placed aboard a train, deaths were inevitable, and the strain of wartime service took its toll on the caregivers. In a letter home, nurse Kate Evelyn Luard wrote of her experience in France: "Imagine a hospital as big as King's College Hospital all packed into a train… No one person can realise the difficulties except those who try to work on it."

Some medical personnel lived aboard the same ambulance train for many months, forming lasting personal and professional relationships. They treasured the moments of rest and visited one another in the mess rooms that were part of their living quarters. Personal touches were added to make spaces more comfortable, and the trains themselves were equipped with showers and steam heating – veritable luxuries when just outside the window temperatures were freezing and other people had not bathed for lengthy periods.

Many wounded British soldiers were repatriated through the large port cities of Dover and Southampton. During the course of the war, Dover received 1,260,506 casualties, the equivalent of 7,781 fully loaded ambulance trains. After arriving in Britain, the wounded were loaded aboard domestic ambulance trains and taken to hospitals across the country. Railway stations became focal points of the war years for Britons, who said farewell to their sons there as they went off to war and then ventured down to greet many of them again as they came home grievously injured.

One observer told a local newspaper reporter, "The unloading of an ambulance train is always a sad sight. They crawl along, moving very slowly. They are bowed and listless… These men left England fine, alert, young soldiers."

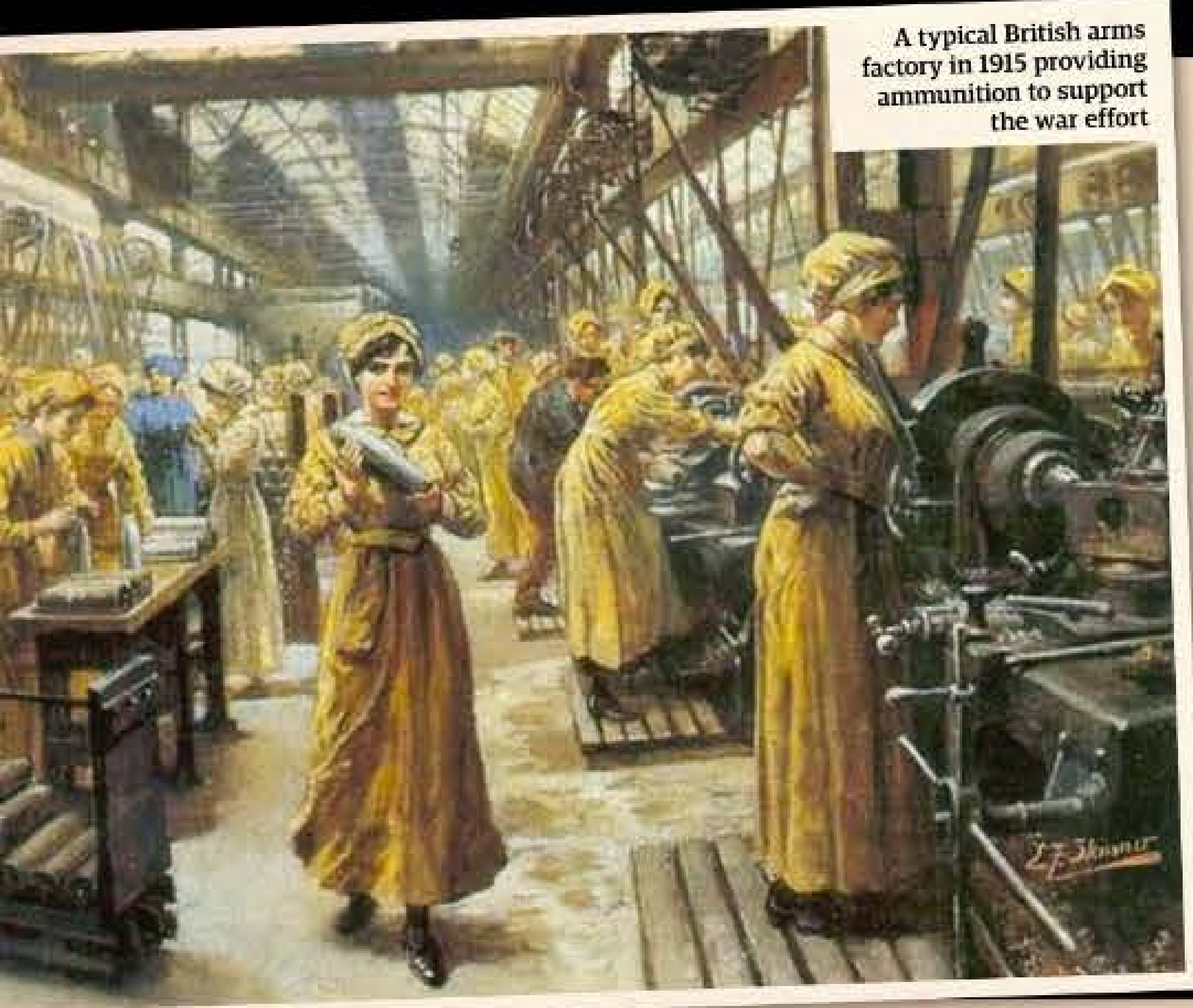
Such is the tragic circumstance of war. In the midst of carnage, though, the ambulance train became an essential component of the British medical care continuum during World War I. By the time the conflict came to a close, 2.7 million wounded soldiers had travelled aboard the ambulance trains. The system's success was such that system was again employed in World War II and during later conflicts of the 20th century.



15 THINGS YOU PROBABLY DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT WOMEN IN WORLD WAR I

While the men were away fighting on the front line, Britain's unsung heroes stood up to be counted

WORDS JACK GRIFFITHS



A typical British arms factory in 1915 providing ammunition to support the war effort

80 PER CENT OF WEAPONS USED BY THE BRITISH ARMY WERE MADE BY WOMEN

1

The war had a profound effect on a woman's role in the workplace. On the eve of the war, approximately 30 per cent of the nation's workforce was female and the majority worked in textile manufacture. This changed entirely as the war stepped up a gear and the need for munitions production increased drastically. It wasn't just shell production that boomed though. The number of women in the transport industry increased by a huge 555 per cent as women helped roll vehicles off the production line and into the warzones of World War I. Without this invaluable help, events such as the shell crisis of 1915 would surely have been worse and might even have happened again. The female input was so great that by 1917, 80 per cent of weapons used by the British Army had been made by Britain's new army of women workers.


The creation of munitions was a dangerous task but essential for British artillery

EXPOSURE TO TNT COULD TURN THE WORKERS YELLOW

2

The munitions industry was big business, and workplace hazards only increased as the factories grew. One of the worst was the effect that explosive agent trinitrotoluene (TNT) had on anyone who worked with it. The explosive of choice for the British Army's cannons, TNT was produced in its droves. During its production, it was frequently handled by women who came to be known as 'canary girls', as exposure caused a condition called toxic jaundice that turned skin yellow. These workers had no protective clothing, and safety measures were often inadequate. Tragically, more than 400 women died from overexposure to TNT during the war. However, TNT wasn't the only danger. The lack of safety concerns and the handling of explosive materials was a dangerous mix, resulting in explosions in the factories. At Chilwell in Nottinghamshire, 134 people died in a blast that levelled the entire complex.


The WLA was such a success that it was pressed into action once again during World War II

THE WOMEN'S LAND ARMY HELPED SAVE BRITAIN FROM FAMINE

3

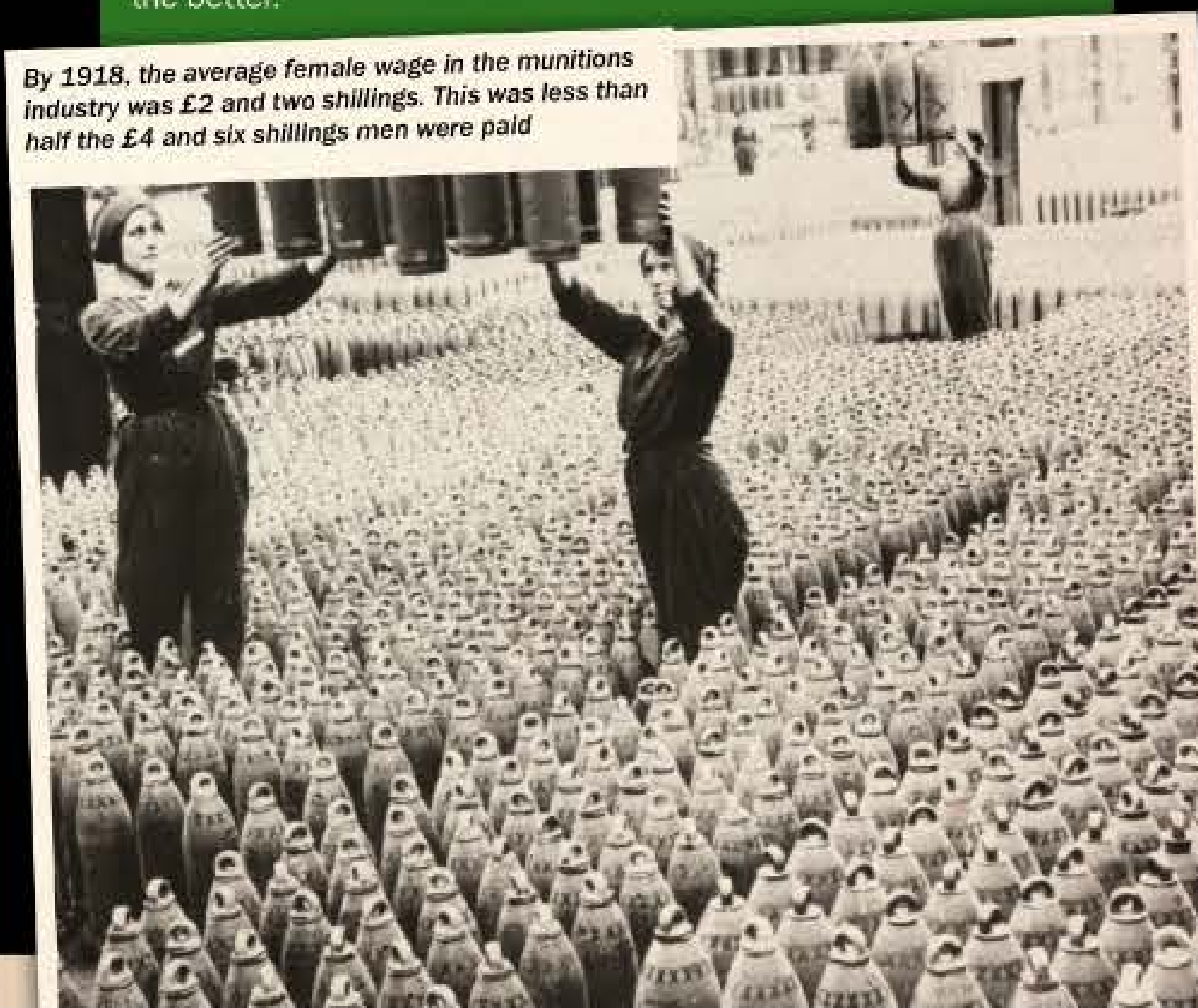
As Germany threatened Britain's supremacy on the seas, starvation through a naval blockade became a dangerous possibility. To last out the war, Britain had to become more self-sufficient. The Board of Agriculture set up the Women's Land Army (WLA) in 1915, employing women to work the land, drive tractors, and plough and drain fields. The working week was up to 50 hours long and each worker was paid £1.12 per week. After a poor harvest and the destruction of supply vessels by German U-boats in 1917, famine loomed as Britain was down to its last three weeks of food reserves. However, starvation was averted and rationing was introduced in London in early 1918. More than 200,000 women were working on the land by 1918, as the WLA continued to help stave off the possibility of famine.

FACTORY WORKERS WERE KNOWN AS 'MUNITIONETTES'

4

The Munitions of War Act was passed in 1915 to give David Lloyd George, then minister of munitions, complete power over the industry. For supply to meet demand, unskilled female workers were brought into the fold. The huge influx of women led to these 'munitionettes' joining trade unions in their thousands. The most famous was led by trade unionist and women's rights campaigner Mary MacArthur, and helped raise safety concerns as well as increase women's pay. Mothers, wives, sisters, daughters and even grandmothers filled the void in the industry left by the men. The days were long and the work was repetitive as women engaged in physically demanding labour. The days were made easier through social activities but there were some trade unions that were against women working, as they believed it would lessen male wages after the war. Despite protests, it was obvious – the British workplace was changing for the better.

By 1918, the average female wage in the munitions industry was £2 and two shillings. This was less than half the £4 and six shillings men were paid





200,000 WOMEN TOOK UP JOBS IN GOVERNMENT

5 Britain's new female workforce excelled in the factories and out in the fields, but they also took jobs in government. Due to the lack of men, women were given the opportunity to work in jobs they would have previously been excluded from. High-up positions took women away from the monotonous work they were used to and helped them prove to politicians that they were worthy of equal rights. Things began slowly as the Liberal government only created a register for women to work in March 1915. 80,000 signed up immediately but there wasn't enough work available. As a result, many took it upon themselves to find work, getting jobs as ambulance drivers, bus conductors and bank clerks. The female work force had started to mobilise.

TOP: In addition to the women working in governmental departments, 500,000 took up clerical positions



MIDDLE: A 1914 postcard showing how the government wanted suffragettes, Irish Nationalists and Unionists to put their political ideologies aside

THE SUFFRAGETTES CHANGED TACK...

6 Emmeline Pankhurst and the suffragettes saw the war as an opportunity. By scaling down their own campaigning and focusing on helping the government, they would prove just how capable women could be. Active campaigning was used once in the 'Right to Serve' protest, but the remainder of the Women's Social and Political Union's (WSPU) energy was geared towards a patriotic stand against the threat of the Central Powers. The new direction caused a split in the WSPU. Emmeline and her daughter Christabel were staunch advocates of ending militant activity and supporting the war, but Christabel's sisters, Sylvia and Adela, weren't. Both pacifists, they made efforts to maintain peace, with Sylvia helping form the Women's Peace Army and Adela setting up the Australian branch of the organisation. The 1918 Representation of the People Act proved both strategies had been in some way successful.



LEFT: The war changed the outlook of the suffragist movement, and for once, Pankhurst and Fawcett were almost treading the same path

ON THE FRONT LINE

Just three of the army of British women who travelled with the men to fight for Britain

Edith Cavell

Perhaps the most famous nurse of the entire war, Edith Cavell is said to have helped more than 200 Allied soldiers escape from German-occupied Belgium into the neutral Netherlands. Cavell cared for soldiers on both sides, but was captured by German officials and shot by a firing squad in October 1915.

Flora Sandes

Just being a nurse wasn't enough for the headstrong Flora Sandes, who enlisted as a Serbian Army soldier. Leaving as soon as Austria-Hungary declared war, Sandes volunteered to work in an ambulance unit. Even when Serbia was invaded, she followed the new government-in-exile to Corfu as part of the Iron Regiment.

Evelina Haverfield

The former suffragette was described by Sylvia Pankhurst as "cold and proud". A determined and active WSPU member, upon the outbreak of the war Haverfield put all her energy into helping in the conflict. She founded the Women's Emergency Corps, which became influential in helping women become doctors, nurses and motorcycle messengers.

...AND SO DID THE SUFFRAGISTS

7 Like the suffragettes, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) endured a split in its organisation. In February 1915, the NUWSS leader Millicent Fawcett realised that talks of peace were futile and decided not to support the Women's Peace Congress. This divided the organisation, with many women sticking to their pacifist guns. As the war raged on, Fawcett, taking a leaf out of the suffragettes' book, ensured the NUWSS helped fund and set up women's hospital units in France, as well as helping form the Women's Emergency Corps and the Women's Volunteer Reserve. One action the group didn't take part in was the White Feather Campaign, which actively shamed men into joining the armed forces. It is without doubt that the hard work of the suffragettes and suffragists during the war was integral in gaining the vote for women.

PROPAGANDA TARGETED AND EXPLOITED WOMEN

8

Pro-war and anti-German posters were abundant in World War I, but propagandists also saw the benefit of including women in their work. Some appealed directly to women to encourage them to contribute to the war effort, but others used women as a tool to encourage more men to sign up to fight.







BRITISH WOMEN SERVED ON THE WESTERN FRONT AS NURSES AND SOLDIERS

9

The input of the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) and the Women's Hospital Corps (WHC) has been underrated. Members of these groups served as drivers and nurses, tending to the legions of men who were lying injured in field hospitals. These hospitals were founded and run by women in both France and Belgium, and the soldiers who went home were sent to the Endell Street Military Hospital, which treated a total of 26,000 patients and performed over 7,000 operations.

One woman enlisted in the army under the alias Denis Smith. Dorothy Lawrence only remained ten days in the ranks of a tunnelling company before she gave herself in after concerns for the company's safety. After interrogation, she was condescendingly thought to have been a 'camp follower', or prostitute. Many British women joined the fight as far afield as Serbia and Russia.





Dorothy Lawrence convinced everyone that she was a male Tommy reporting for duty



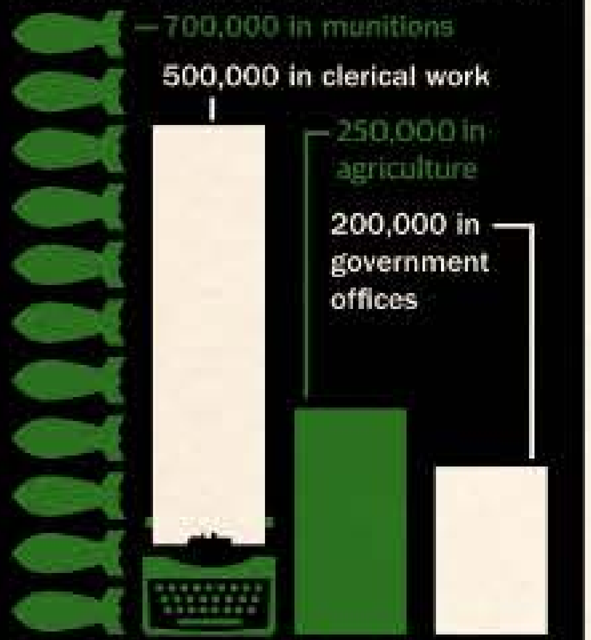
The role of women in the armed forces only grew as time wore on but sadly many of the service records were destroyed by German bombing in 1940

A FEMALE AUXILIARY CORPS WAS SET UP

10

Not everyone was like Dorothy Lawrence and joined up with the male rank and file. The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) only began in 1917 but quickly proved itself to be an effective wartime organisation. Recommended by Lieutenant-General H Lawson, far more women applied than anticipated and would be rewarded with a minimum pay of 24 shillings a week. It was structured into four units: Cookery, Mechanical, Clerical and Miscellaneous. The influx took the pressure off men performing 'soft jobs' in the army and allowed them to fight on the front while women worked behind the lines. A total of 57,000 women served in the corps but, despite its success, there was still resistance to the WAAC. British newspapers falsely claimed that large numbers of women were pregnant by soldiers, even though an official investigation found this to be grossly exaggerated. The WAAC was disbanded in 1921 but restarted again as the Auxiliary Territorial Service in World War II.

IN NUMBERS



Where women worked in World War I

100,000

women joined the armed forces during the course of the war

5 million

women were in employment in 1918

54,000

spectators attended the 1920 munitionettes cup final at Goodison Park, the home of Everton FC

12 million

letters were sent by British women to the front line



It is believed that 38,000 women worked as nurses, ambulance drivers and cooks on both the Home and Western fronts

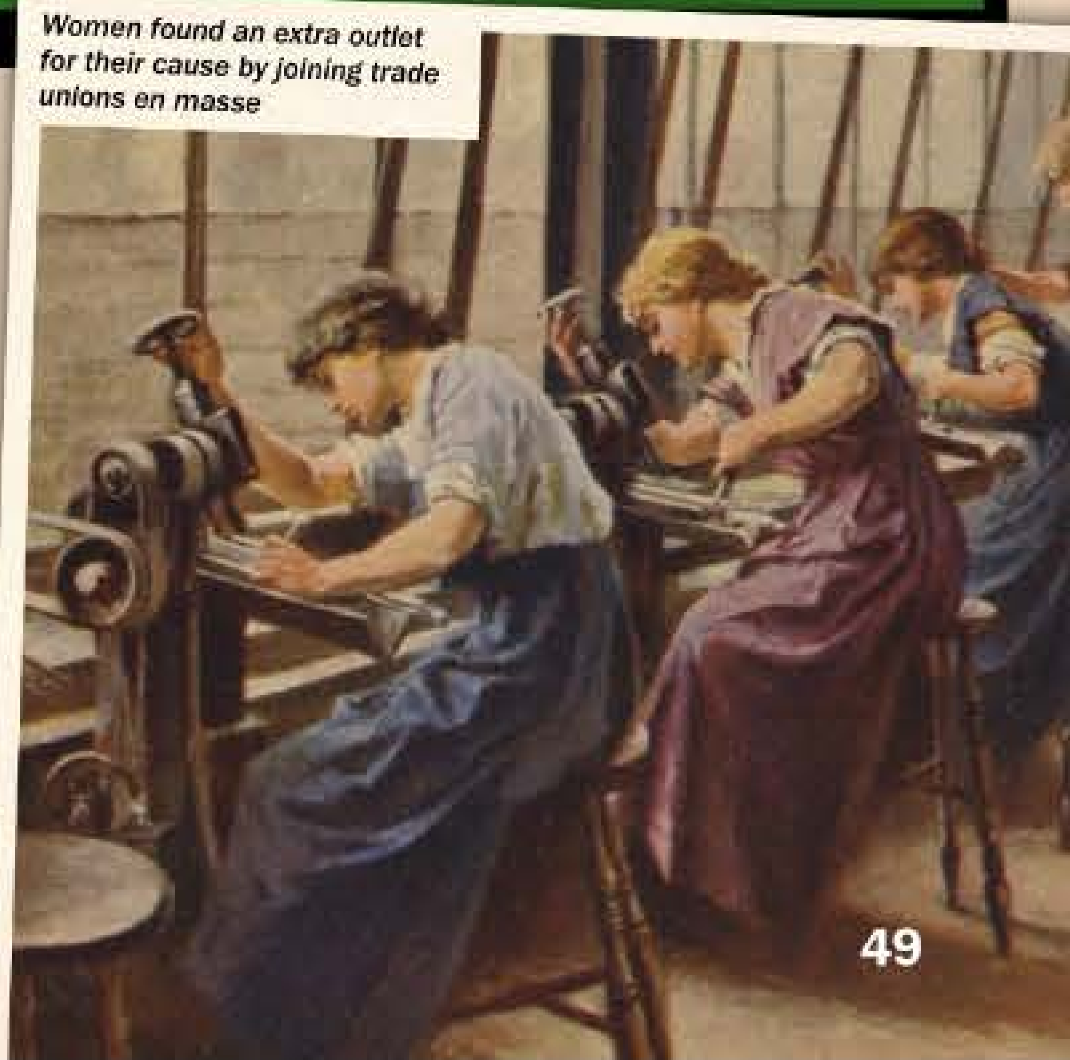
11 FEMALE VOLUNTEERS TAUGHT MEN HOW TO USE FIREARMS

The Women's Defence Relief Corps consisted of two divisions, the civil section and the lesser-known semi-military section. The latter gave women the chance to undergo drills, marching and signalling as well as instruction in the use of firearms. This training in military values did much for the White Feather Campaign and helped convince men to join up for the fight. The Local Defence Volunteers (LDV) were the predecessors of the Home Guard in World War II. The organisation employed women to help men train to fire weapons. Additionally, the Bolton War Hospital Supply Depot represented another way women could contribute to the war from back home. More than 20,000 packages were sent to men on the front from this one depot alone as women did their best to make life easier.

12 BRITAIN'S FIRST FEMALE-LED STRIKE TOOK PLACE

Women's trade union membership increased dramatically during the war; there was a 160 per cent rise in female members. The unions that benefited most were the National Federation of Women Workers and the Worker's Union (WU). By 1918, the WU had 20 full-time female officials and a female membership of more than 80,000 – a quarter of the union's entire membership. A few months before the end of the war, female workers on London buses and trams led a strike, demanding equal pay – the first in the UK to be initiated and won by women. The strike spread to the Underground and other towns across the country. This showed the power women could wield when part of an organisation, and was a total departure from the pre-war years, when 90 per cent of women weren't part of a union.

Women found an extra outlet for their cause by joining trade unions en masse



A GLOBAL REVOLUTION

It wasn't just British women who did their country proud in the Great War

Germany



Just like Britain, Germany found itself in need of a labour force as men were put forward onto the Western and Eastern fronts. Food blockades by the Allied forces just made things worse for the families left at home without a husband or a father. Youth and female employment increased drastically to provide the men with munitions. After the war, children and teenagers benefited more than women as they began to rely less on their parents and could find work more easily in the interwar period. Society stood still for women, however, who were still treated as inferior to men in the workplace.

USA



World War I saw the employment of 3 million women in the food, textile and war industries in the USA. With the men abroad, American women took jobs as streetcar conductors and radio operators, and kept the factories up and running. Firms that usually specialised in car production or clothing were converted into tank and uniform factories respectively. Additionally, 11,000 women served abroad as nurses. World War I was the first war to officially allow women to serve. The navy in particular was struggling to cope with demand, and the Naval act of 1916 allowed women to sign up and serve as 'Yeomen'.

Russia



Going further than any other country, Russia mobilised women within the army. By 1917, segregated units were created by the tsar in an effort to win the war and turn the social and political tide. These female soldiers became media celebrities in their home country. The infamous Women's Death Battalion was created by Maria Bochkareva and went on to fight in the trenches of the Austro-Hungarian front after the men had abandoned it. The battalion even went as far as defending the Winter Palace in Petrograd from Bolshevik forces. Because of this, they are sparsely mentioned in the history of the USSR.

THE FIRST POLICEWOMEN WENT ON THE BEAT

13

Originally known as Women's Patrols, the first female police officers helped maintain discipline and monitor workplace behaviour while war raged in Europe. They were mainly found in factories, but the force also worked in public areas such as railway stations, parks, cinemas and pubs. Despite being part of the police, these officers didn't have the power to arrest and could only present evidence in court on behalf of a male officer. Margaret Dahmer Dawson and Mary Sophia Allen were instrumental in the formation of the Women's Police Volunteers. Taking the mantle from the National Union of Working Women, who had set up 5,000 voluntary patrols, the group soon morphed into the Women's Police Service and were put on duty in all major cities.

"THE INFAMOUS WOMEN'S DEATH BATTALION WAS CREATED BY MARIA BOCHKAREVA AND WENT ON TO FIGHT IN THE TRENCHES OF THE AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN FRONT"



Officers being inspected by Mary Sophia Allen, one of the key figures in the Women's Police Volunteers



Married women struggled to find work in peacetime, more so than their single counterparts

SINGLE WOMEN FOUND THEMSELVES AT AN ADVANTAGE AFTER THE WAR

14 The loss of 750,000 British men in the war had a drastic effect on the lives of British women. Newspapers printed stories of a so-called 'surplus of women' that would never find husbands after the high wartime casualties. However, remaining single did have its benefits.

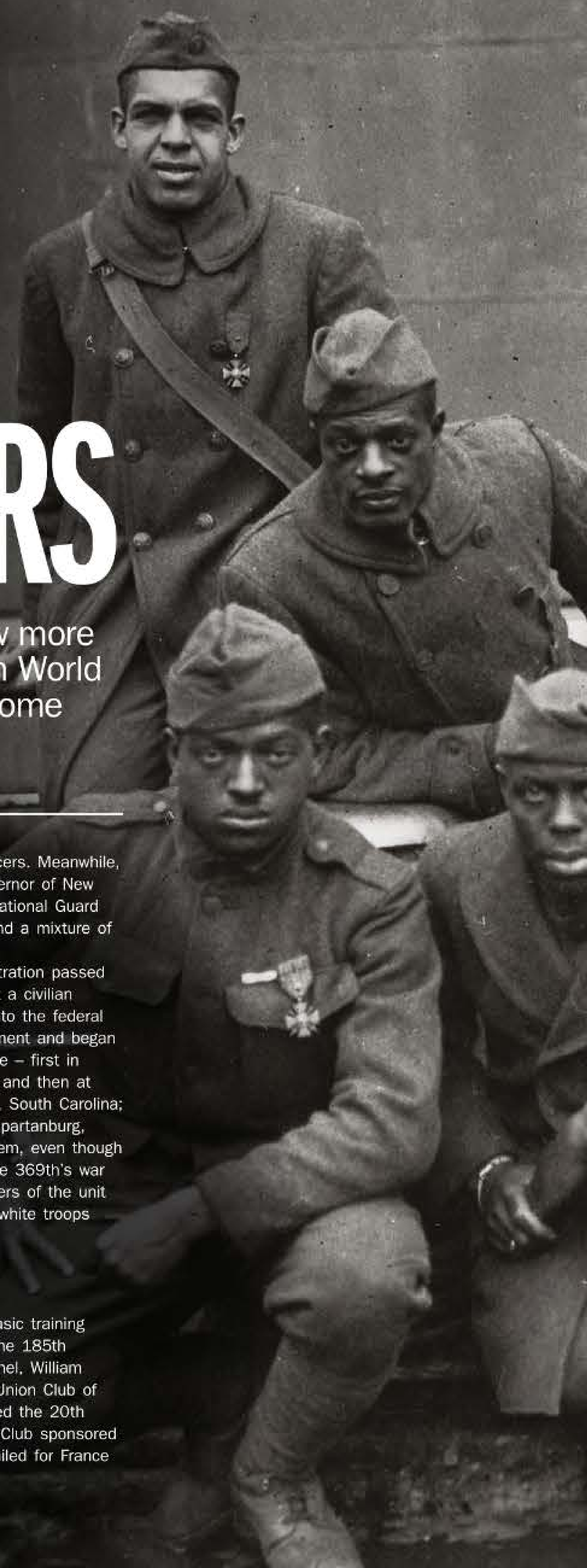
Single women had much better job prospects than married ones. A wife who saw her husband return home would most likely have to nurse him back to health, which could hamper her chances of finding work. Some professions only allowed single women to apply. The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 helped end this, but only one in ten married women were in work by the 1930s.



WOMEN'S FOOTBALL KICKED OFF

15 As women started to work together in large numbers, social and sporting events began to spring up. Of all the social gatherings, football was the pastime that really became popular. Factory bosses actively encouraged sport, as it improved the workers' health and wellbeing. The friendly activity soon turned into competition, and several teams were formed. One of the most famous teams was Dick, Kerr's Ladies FC, who played in Preston. Formed in 1917, the club drew a crowd of 10,000 people for their first match. Later that year, the Munitionettes cup was won by Blyth Spartans, with striker Bella Reay scoring a hat-trick. The women's game reached a peak when 54,000 spectators crammed into Goodison Park on Boxing Day 1920. Sadly, women's football was banned in 1921, as it was expected that women would return to the household. Despite its wartime popularity, women's football would not officially return until the ban was lifted in 50 years later, in 1971. Women's football is now popular worldwide.

"THE LOSS OF 750,000 BRITISH MEN IN THE WAR HAD A DRASTIC EFFECT ON THE LIVES OF BRITISH WOMEN. NEWSPAPERS PRINTED STORIES OF A SO-CALLED 'SURPLUS OF WOMEN' THAT WOULD NEVER FIND HUSBANDS AFTER THE HIGH WARTIME CASUALTIES. HOWEVER, REMAINING SINGLE DID HAVE ITS BENEFITS"



HARLEM HELLFIGHTERS

The all-black 369th Infantry Regiment saw more active duty than any other American unit in World War I – and it also fought prejudice at home

WORDS **DOMINIC GREEN**

The Harlem Hellfighters were born in 1915 as the 15th New York National Guard Infantry Regiment, but it was not the United States of America's first 'segregated' unit. In the civil war, the Union Club of New York had sponsored the all-black 20th US Colored Infantry, and after 1866, the famous 'Buffalo Soldiers' of the 10th US Colored Infantry fought the Native Americans of the Southwest. They also took part in the invasion of Cuba in 1898.

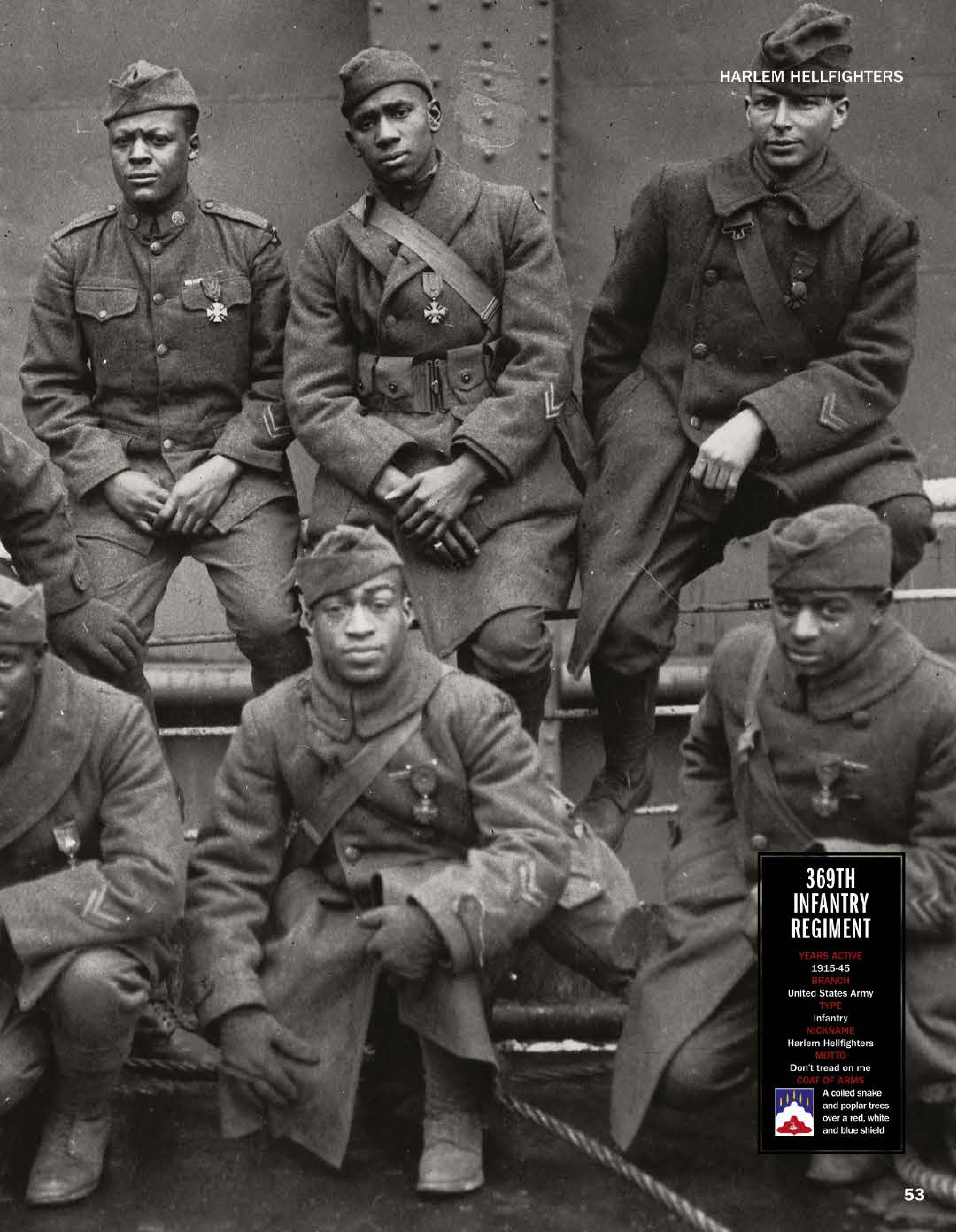
1915 was also the year that a German U-boat sunk the Lusitania. President Woodrow Wilson's administration knew that American entry into World War I was only a matter of time; both the army and the National Guard required immediate expansion. Black Americans were potential recruits who wanted to demonstrate their value: eager enough to train with brooms in store fronts. Many white politicians trusted they would succeed, and so military necessity met emancipatory ideals, creating political will.

Secretary of War Newton D Baker engaged Emmett J Scott, an adviser to the visionary of black liberation activist and presidential advisor Booker T Washington, as an adviser to himself, and President Wilson accepted an offer from the Central Committee of Negro College Men to set up a training camp for black officers. Meanwhile, supported by the Republican governor of New York State, the 15th New York National Guard began to recruit black soldiers and a mixture of black and white officers.

In May 1917, Wilson's administration passed the Selective Service Act to draft a civilian army. The 15th were absorbed into the federal army as the 369th Infantry Regiment and began training for the trenches of France – first in Camp Whitman, New York State, and then at Camp Wadsworth in Spartanburg, South Carolina; they were in the South now. In Spartanburg, shopkeepers refused to serve them, even though they wore the army's uniform. The 369th's war nearly started early, when members of the unit almost exchanged fire with irate white troops from Alabama.

RACE AND WAR

By the end of 1917, with their basic training complete, the 'Old 15th' joined the 185th Infantry Brigade. Their white colonel, William Hayward, was a member of the Union Club of New York City, who had sponsored the 20th Colored Infantry. Now, the Union Club sponsored a second black regiment as it sailed for France



369TH INFANTRY REGIMENT

YEARS ACTIVE
1915-45
BRANCH
United States Army
TYPE
Infantry
NICKNAME
Harlem Hellfighters
MOTTO
Don't tread on me
COAT OF ARMS
A coiled snake and poplar trees over a red, white and blue shield

with the American Expeditionary Force. The mostly black 93rd Division disembarked at Brest in December 1917.

The USA carried its race problem to war. White-American soldiers disliked the idea of serving with black Americans. Of the 200,000 blacks who were to serve in the Expeditionary Force, some 150,000 were restricted to dock work and manual labour. At first, the 369th were consigned to latrine digging. They received abuse and violent assaults from white-American soldiers, and their own commanders distrusted them enough to issue a pamphlet, *Secret Information Concerning Black American Troops*, warning their French hosts that black Americans were racially inferior and prone to raping white women. The AEF's commander, John 'Black Jack' Pershing, decreed that the officers in all-black regiments must be all black or all white, otherwise blacks might give orders to whites. In their first months in France, the 369th's most important contribution to the war effort came from its marching band, who introduced jazz to audiences of British and French soldiers.

The 369th had to join another country's forces before getting a taste of combat. The French army, now in its fourth year of fighting, had suffered heavy losses. French soldiers, used to serving with Senegalese and Algerians from France's African colonies, tended to be less racist. In May 1918, the 369th, having received further training under French officers, and now sporting a motley dress – American uniforms with French helmets, belts and holsters – joined the French 161st Division in its trenches in Flanders.

Almost immediately, the 369th won a reputation for bravery. In the small hours of 15 May 1918, Privates Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts were on guard duty when they found themselves under sniper fire from 50 yards' range. Johnson had just ordered Roberts to bring up a crate of grenades when a large German patrol, numbering as many as 30 soldiers, attacked their post. As Johnson lobbed grenades, Roberts was badly wounded; able only to sit up, he continued to pass grenades to Johnson. The Germans rushed their position, and two of them tried to take Roberts prisoner. Johnson tried to load his French rifle with an American clip, jamming it. He whipped out a bolo (a kind of machete from the Philippines) and frantically slashed at his attackers, at times using his bare fists. He held out until reinforcements arrived, then fainted; he had been wounded 21 times. The French government awarded Johnson and Roberts its highest honour, the Croix de Guerre, with a special citation and a golden palm for Johnson. After this, the 369th's French comrades called them the 'Men of Bronze', and then the 'Hell-fighters'.

"GOD DAMN, LET'S GO!"

After six weeks of shelling and skirmishing in the trenches, the 369th went over the top on 15 July 1918 in the Second Battle of the Marne. Germany's Spring Offensive had failed, and Erich Ludendorff, commander of the German forces, gambled on a second offensive. This soon faltered; by the end of the first day, Allied troops, including those of the US 3rd Division, had launched the first Allied counter-attacks.

Over the following weeks, the 369th, with the battle cry "God damn, let's go!", took part in the Allied counter-offensive that broke the deadlock in Flanders and forced the Germans back towards the fortified Hindenburg Line. Losses were heavy. "In the mornings," Sergeant 'Spats' Davis wrote to his brother Arthur in Harlem, "most of the valleys we went through in those days were full of gas and smoke from exploding shells or from the previous day's bombardment. The sickly sweet odour still smites my nostrils with a little imagination."

By the first week of August, the men had been under fire for 130 days. 14 were dead and 51 wounded. One officer was dead, after stumbling into a swamp awash with German machine guns; the 'world-famed rag-time band' of the 15th Heavy Foot played at his funeral.





Troops of the 369th in the trenches on the Western Front in 1918



In 2015, President Barack Obama bestows the Medal of Honor to Henry Johnson. Accepting on his behalf is Command Sergeant Major Louis Wilson of the New York National Guard

FORGOTTEN HELLFIGHTERS

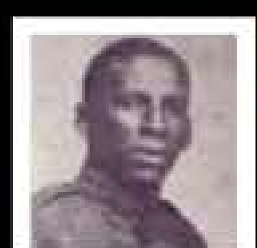
AFTER FRANCE, THE HELLFIGHTERS FACED A LONG STRUGGLE WITH RACISM AT HOME



NEEDHAM ROBERTS
RANK: Private
YEARS OF SERVICE: 1915-19
MILITARY HONOURS RECEIVED: Croix de Guerre (France), Purple Heart (USA) Johnson's partner on sentry duty, Roberts was badly wounded in the initial German attack. Although unable to move, he continued to fight, by passing grenades to Johnson. He became the second American soldier to receive the Croix de Guerre.



VERTNER WOODSON TANDY
RANK: First Lieutenant
YEARS OF SERVICE: 1915-19
MILITARY HONOURS RECEIVED: None
In 1907, Tandy became the USA's first African-American qualified architect. When the 'Old 15th' formed, he became the first African American to pass the US Army's commissioning examinations. After the war, he established a successful architectural business.



RAFAEL HERNANDEZ MARIN
RANK: Private
YEARS OF SERVICE: 1917-19
MILITARY HONOURS RECEIVED: None.
In 1917, the musical brothers Rafael and Jesus Hernandez were two of the 16 Puerto Rican musicians recruited by James Reese Europe, the leader of the Hellfighters' regimental band, the Orchestra Europe. After the war, Rafael became a hit songwriter.



The Hellfighters on parade

HENRY LINCOLN JOHNSON

THE FIRST AMERICAN TO RECEIVE FRANCE'S HIGHEST MEDAL FOR VALOUR

RANK: Corporal **YEARS OF SERVICE:** 1915-19 **MILITARY HONOURS RECEIVED:** Croix de Guerre (France)



Born to poor parents in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Johnson moved north to Albany, New York, as a teenager. Before enlisting he worked as a chauffeur, a labourer in a coal yard and a railway porter. At one point in the fighting on the night of 14-15 May 1918, Johnson, having run out of ammunition, threw one of his German assailants over his shoulder, who then stabbed him in the ribs. Johnson had multiple wounds, mostly from knives and bayonets, in his back, face, left arm, and left foot, which was so badly damaged that doctors inserted a steel plate in it. Johnson remained modest about his heroism. "There wasn't anything so fine about it," he said, "Just fought for my life. A rabbit would have done that." After the war, he returned to his wife Edna and their three children, but his wounds prevented him from working as a railway porter. He died penniless and an alcoholic in 1929.

On 26 September 1918, the 2,400 men of the 369th were part of the French 4th Army that supported the American drive into the Meuse-Argonne. After a six-hour nocturnal artillery barrage "like the roll of a titanic drum," two of the 369th's three battalions went over the top in the first wave of the offensive, flanked by two pairs of French battalions. At a "quiet military walk" they moved uphill towards the German lines through dawn mist, expecting the machine guns to open up at any moment.

But the 2nd Battalion found that the German trenches in its path had been annihilated in the bombardment; the New Yorkers swept between two deserted German strongholds. They advanced so quickly that they outstripped their French battalions and had to pause to preserve the Allied line. The 3rd Battalion, however, met machine-gun fire on the swampy shore of the Dormoise River. When Private Horace Pippin dived into a shell hole to escape sniper fire, he was shot in the neck. As he lay in the hole, he was badly wounded by shell fire. A French soldier leaned over the crater's edge, trying to help him, but a sniper's bullet "blew out his face." The corpse fell onto Pippin, pinning him in the mud. Pippin, unable to use his right arm, grabbed the dead poilu's pack with his left hand and found a flask of coffee, which he drank in an effort to stay awake. He was retrieved the following night, half-drowned and unconscious.

That same night, the 2nd Battalion was destroyed by machine-gun fire as it climbed the slopes below Bellevue Ridge. The Hellfighters' objective, the "weird and eerie town" of Séchault and the railway junction at Challerange, still lay ahead of the ridge across a flat, oak-forested plain. A mile from Séchault, the 2nd Battalion came under heavy shell fire; its commander was killed. As the 3rd Battalion pushed into the town, fighting house-to-house with bayonets and grenades, the 2nd Battalion and fresh troops from the 1st Battalion outflanked the retreating defenders.

FIRST AMERICANS TO THE RHINE

American casualties were higher than among the more experienced French. As Colonel Hayward observed, this was the first time that the Hellfighters had fought "a war of movement". More than half of the 2nd Battalion were now casualties. Only 100 men and three officers were unharmed. One officer came through with only two of his men still in action. The rest of the battalion were "simply shell-shocked, gassed, sunk to the verge of delirium." The 1st and 3rd Battalion coalesced to form a single ragged battalion. To maintain morale, Matt Bullock, in peacetime a football coach at the University of Massachusetts, sprinted up and down the line under fire, delivering cigarettes and chewing tobacco.

Now, after three days of intense and bloody fighting, the Hellfighters had to cross a mile of woods, scarred with shell craters and German trenches, to take the farmhouse that dominated the railway junction at Challerange. They advanced at dawn. Immediately, their right flank came under fire. The woods bristled with machine guns and snipers. Lieutenant George S Robb was wounded for the fourth time in 24 hours. Weak from loss of blood, he shepherded his men to safety when they came under fire and retrieved a wounded officer. He became the only man of the 369th to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor, although, as his grandchildren note, he was white.

A French unit relieved the Hellfighters the following night. Over eight days of fighting, nine officers and 135 enlisted men had been killed. Nearly 1,000 had been wounded by gunshots, gas, artillery concussions and shell shock. Some 600 had retreated while lightly wounded; half of those men had then been rallied into a provisional battalion and led back into the battle. Less than a third of the regiment had survived without injury. The Hellfighters had been under fire for a total of 191 days, longer than any other American unit in the war. They had not lost a single prisoner.

The 369th were sent to the mountains of the Vosges, a quiet part of the line, to recover and absorb reinforcements. On 17 November 1918, less than a week after the Armistice, their French commanders accorded them the honour of becoming the first American troops to reach to the German frontier on the bank of the Rhine. On 26 November, Colonel Hayward climbed down from his horse's saddle, scooped up a handful of river water and made a point of drinking it before his troops' eyes.

In December 1918, the French Army bestowed the Croix de Guerre collectively upon the

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE MILITARY

FROM THE RUNAWAY SLAVES WHO FOUGHT FOR BRITAIN IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION TO THE BLACK NORTHERNERS WHO FOUGHT FOR THE UNION FOR LESS PAY THAN THEIR WHITE PEERS, TO THE HELLFIGHTERS AND THE PRESENT DAY, BLACK AMERICANS HAVE ALWAYS FOUGHT FOR THEIR FREEDOM



REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Shot by British soldiers in 1770, Crispus Attucks, the son of a freed slave, becomes the American Revolution's very first casualty.

- In 1775, George Washington ordered recruiters not to recruit blacks.
- Still, 9,000 black Americans fought for the Patriots.
- In Virginia, Lord Dunmore formed an all-black Ethiopian Regiment.
- About 100,000 blacks died during the Revolutionary War.
- After the war, the British resettled 3,000 'Black Loyalists' in Nova Scotia, Canada.

1775-1783

MILITIA ACTS OF 1792

Prohibit African Americans from carrying arms in the militias of the recently founded United States of America.



1792

1ST RHODE ISLAND REGIMENT

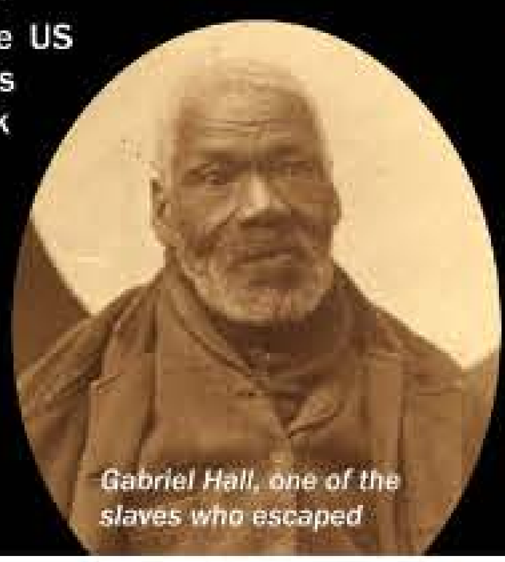
First all-black military unit in the USA.



1775-83

THE WAR OF 1812

Although the US Navy refuses to use black sailors, a manpower shortage means that one in eight crewmen are black.


Gabriel Hall, one of the slaves who escaped

- On some US privateers, half the crew were black.
- When the Royal Navy docked at Chesapeake in 1813, thousands of slaves escaped by rowing out to the fleet.
- The British formed three companies of all-black Colonial Marines.

1812



THE CIVIL WAR

Black soldiers are able to enlist after the Second Confiscation and Militia Act (1862), but they are not as well-paid as white soldiers.

- At first, black Union soldiers received $10 a month, minus a $3 deduction for uniforms. White Union soldiers received $13 a month, without deductions.
- The Union army recruited a total of 175 US Colored Troops regiments.
- 18 African Americans won the Congressional Medal of Honor.
- By 1865, one in ten Union soldiers was black.

1861-65

WILLIAM HARVEY CARNEY

RANK: Sergeant
First African American to be granted the Medal of Honor
When the colour guard is killed during the assault on Fort Wagner, Carney, though wounded, carries the flag forward.



1863

1917-18

WORLD WAR I

- One in ten of the AEF's initial 2 million soldiers
- Only a quarter of the 200,000 black troops in the AEF saw battle. The majority were used as reserve labour battalions.
- About 320,000 members of the AEF became casualties. Of those, nearly 120,000 were killed.
- The Spanish Flu epidemic of late 1918 took the lives of more than 25,000 AEF men.
- By the end of the war, more than 350,000 black troops had served in the AEF.

The Harlem Hellfighters were the first black American regiment to go into battle in World War I.

1866

CATHAY WILLIAMS

RANK: Private

Williams disguises herself as a man and becomes the first African-American woman to enlist in the United States Army.

1866-1951



BUFFALO SOLDIERS

The Negro Cavalry are not allowed to forget their origins. Their Indian adversaries called them 'Buffalo Soldiers', because their hair resembled a buffalo's.

1866-91

THE INDIAN CAMPAIGNS

- The four regiments of Negro Cavalry raised in 1866 were the US Army's first peacetime all-black regiments.
- 18 men received the Medal of Honor for bravery during the Indian Campaigns.
- In September 1867, Private John Randall killed 13 of the 70 Cheyenne warriors who attacked him. He was wounded 17 times.

1918

FREDDIE STOWERS

RANK: Corporal

The first of only two African-American soldiers to receive a Medal of Honor for action in World War I. Stowers dies leading his men in a frontal attack on a German machine-gun nest. His Medal of Honor will be granted in 1991.

1940-1952

TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

First African-American military aviators in the US Armed Forces



1941-45

WORLD WAR II

- More than 2.5 million African-American men registered for the draft.
- On 1 June 1942, Howard Perry became the first black recruit to enlist in the US Marines.
- Woodrow Crockett, one of the 332nd Fighter Group (the 'Tuskegee Airmen'), flew 149 missions over Germany and Italy in 1944 and 1945.
- No Medals of Honor were awarded to African Americans during World War II. In 1997, seven were awarded – six of them posthumously.

2018

PRESENT DAY

- Blacks are 17 per cent of the US population, but only 10 per cent of Marine Corps soldiers.
- 22 per cent of the blacks in the US Army are combat troops.
- Today, five black members of the US armed forces have risen to the rank of four-star general; in 2014, Michelle Howard became the first black woman to do so.
- 10 per cent of army officers are black, and 5-7 per cent of navy and air force officers.

President Barack Obama became the first African-American commander in chief of the US Armed Forces.



1948

EXECUTIVE ORDER 9981

Signed into law by President Harry Truman, this order bans segregation and discrimination in the USA's armed forces.

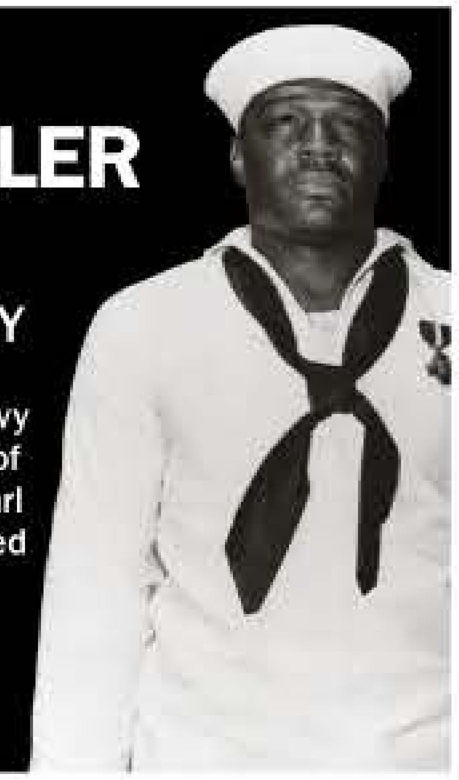


1942

DORIS MILLER

FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN TO RECEIVE THE NAVY CROSS

Miller is awarded the Navy Cross for repeated acts of bravery under fire at Pearl Harbor. He would be killed in 1943 at the Battle of Makin Island.





JAMES REESE EUROPE AND THE MARCHING BAND

THE HELLFIGHTERS' REGIMENTAL BAND INTRODUCED JAZZ TO EUROPE

When war broke out, James Reese Europe, one of the most successful black musicians in New York, volunteered for the 'Old 15th' – and so did his entire band. Reese saw combat in France as a lieutenant in the Hellfighters, but his greatest contribution was musical. In the course of 1918, he and his band travelled more than 2,000 miles in France, playing concerts for troops and French civilians. As violinist, drummer and vocalist Noble Sissle recalled, these performances sparked 'ragtime-itis' in France. They also inspired several British soldiers who, after leaving the army, started playing jazz in London in the 1920s. In May 1919, he was murdered by one of his musicians.



regiment for their bravery at Séchault. Their American commanders did not, however, permit them to take part in the victory parade in Paris, even though the French and British allowed their non-white colonial troops to share in the victory.

Little more than a month later, the Hellfighters became the first New York unit to return from France. They received a hero's welcome: a victory march that ran from southern Manhattan and all the way up Fifth Avenue to their barracks in Harlem. Their 100-strong marching band, directed by James Reese Europe, led the parade, with support from the New York Police Band. From the viewing stand at 60th Street, Alfred Smith, governor of New York, saluted them.

HOME TO HARLEM

The reception in Harlem was rapturous. "Flowers fell in showers from above," the *New York World* reported. The crowd rushed the street and the soldiers broke ranks. Henry Johnson rode through the streets in an open car as Harlemites chanted: "O-oh, you wick-ed Hen-nery Johnson! You wick-ed ma-an!"

The 369th rejoined the National Guard and its men tried to return to their peacetime lives. Henry Johnson, whose right foot was now held together by a metal plate, was discharged without a disability payment. He allowed his image to be used to promote the sale of Liberty Bond stamps: "Henry Johnson licked a dozen Germans. How many have you licked?", they said.

Johnson tried to return to his pre-war job as a railway porter at Albany, NY, but he found that his wounds made the work impossible. He began to drink heavily. Penniless and sick, he died in 1929, a few months after he was nominated as one of the USA's five greatest heroes in the war by Theodore Roosevelt, a veteran of the Expeditionary Force, and who had also received the Croix de Guerre. The US Army continued to use Johnson's image in recruitment campaigns until 1976.

Today, after serving in World War II as an artillery unit based in Hawaii, the 369th continues as the 369th Sustainment Brigade. The Hellfighters have received the acknowledgement that they did not receive in their lifetimes. In 1994, the Hellfighters' Armory in Harlem was added to the National Register of Historic Places. In 2003, a four-mile stretch of Harlem River Drive was renamed Harlem Hellfighters Drive. Three years later, in 2006, the City of New York erected a black granite memorial to the Hellfighters, identical to the existing memorial in France. It's in Harlem.

Nor has Henry Johnson been forgotten. In 1996, he received a posthumous Purple Heart. The city of Albany has named a street, a monument and a school after him, and erected a bust in bronze: a fitting and overdue memorial to one of the bravest of the Men of Bronze.

James Reese Europe's band march to greet soldiers returning from the trenches

SHOT AT DAWN

Abandoning your post was met with the harshest of consequences at the time, but 100 years on, those who were executed for cowardice finally earned their rightful place in history

WORDS JACK GRIFFITHS



The young private wished he could turn back the clock. Frightened and confused, his superiors simply didn't understand his protestations as he was carried off to face the business end of a Lee Enfield rifle. Proof, if it was ever needed, not to desert your post. Between 1914-20, 3,000 British soldiers were sentenced to death for cowardice, desertion and other capital offences. Although the majority of these sentences were commuted, 346 men who had signed up to fight the Boche met their fate at the hands of their allies, shot by firing squads made up of their own comrades. Of the 346 killed, 40 had been charged with murder and mutiny and would have been handed the same sentence in a civil court. The other 306 executions are now considered to be among the most shameful in British history, with claims these men were not cowards but simply suffering from shell shock.

The trenches of the Western Front were a terrible place. Sleep deprived and ridden with trench foot, the soldiers endured a living hell. Dead bodies and latrines filled the soldiers' living spaces, and huge rats and lice infested the trenches. The conditions only became worse in the winter as the fields froze over. The stalemate, constant droning of artillery and the never-ending threat of snipers caused both boredom and isolation. Pinned down and with death and destruction all around, many saw desertion as the only way out.

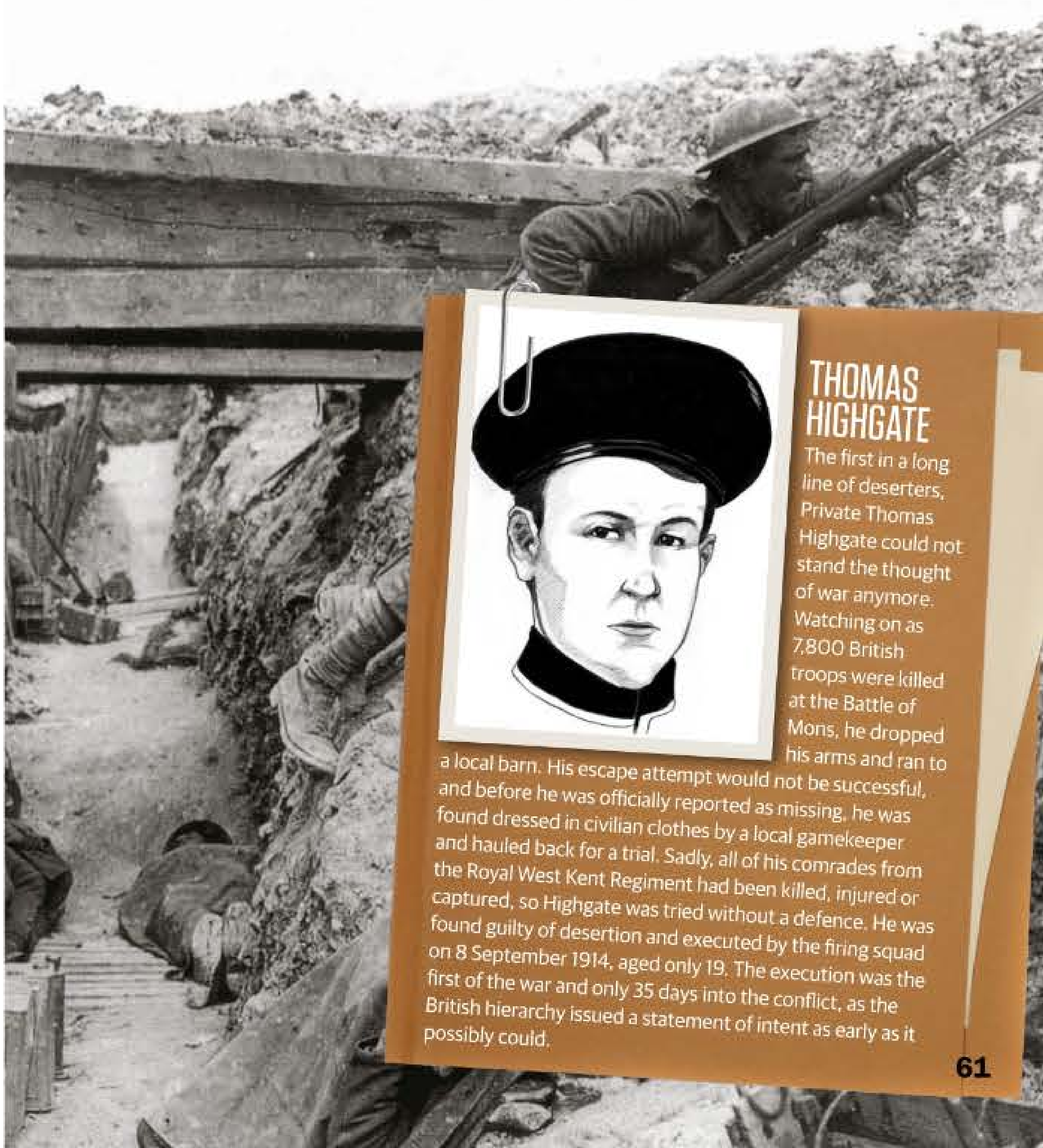
Prior to the Great War, flogging was a common punishment in the British Army, but this was abolished in the 1881 Army Act. When World War I broke out, desertion became punishable by death.

The first deserter to be executed was Thomas Highgate, and his killing demonstrated that the army were pulling no punches. The accused were almost never given a formal legal representative and sometimes a judge wasn't even present in their 20-minute hearings.

By January 1915, four months after Highgate's death, General Routine Order 585 was put in place. Soldiers were no longer innocent until proven guilty and evidence was required before they could be proved innocent. Even those who were clearly confused and not consciously trying to escape were quickly rounded up and charged with desertion. For the men on the other side of the rifle, some steps were taken to maintain their sanity while being forced to kill their former comrades in cold blood. The firing squads were handed pre-loaded rifles with one of the guns said to contain a blank round. If issued, this crumb of comfort allowed each of the executioners to maintain a glimmer of hope that they weren't the killer.

By the end of World War I, 80,000 soldiers in the British Army had been treated for shell shock and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but this did nothing to lessen the stigma surrounding it. Every major power involved in the war kept the executions silent, and families were simply told their relatives had been 'killed in action'. It was only in 2006, after a much-contested campaign for a pardon, that their names were added to memorials.





THOMAS HIGHGATE

The first in a long line of deserters, Private Thomas Highgate could not stand the thought of war anymore. Watching on as 7,800 British troops were killed at the Battle of Mons, he dropped his arms and ran to a local barn. His escape attempt would not be successful, and before he was officially reported as missing, he was found dressed in civilian clothes by a local gamekeeper and hauled back for a trial. Sadly, all of his comrades from the Royal West Kent Regiment had been killed, injured or captured, so Highgate was tried without a defence. He was found guilty of desertion and executed by the firing squad on 8 September 1914, aged only 19. The execution was the first of the war and only 35 days into the conflict, as the British hierarchy issued a statement of intent as early as it possibly could.



> "The tears were rolling down my cheeks as he went on attempting to free himself from the ropes attaching him to the chair. I aimed blindly and when the gun smoke had cleared away, we were further horrified to see that, although wounded, the intended victim was still alive. Still blindfolded, he was attempting to make a run for it still strapped to the chair. The blood was running freely from a chest wound.
> An officer in charge stepped forward to put the finishing touch with a revolver held to the poor man's temple. He had only once cried out and that was when he shouted the one word 'mother'. He could not have been much older than me. We were told later that he had in fact been suffering from shell shock, a condition not recognised by the army at the time. Later I took part in four more such executions."

Victor Silvester, who was part of a 1916 firing squad

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS AND CONSCRIPTION

Britain was the only major European power not to have conscription in place when the war began, and approximately 16,000 men conscientiously objected to fighting. The motivation behind this reluctance to raise arms was primarily pacifism, and about 7,000 decided to undertake non-combat roles instead. Known as alternativists, their jobs included tasks like stretcher bearing, helping staff the kitchens and general administrative roles. The Quakers in particular held strong anti-war views, and rather than pick up a rifle, they offered humanitarian relief for civilians affected by the conflict. The relief workers visited countries all over Europe such as Austria, Russia and Serbia, and also helped on the Western Front by building 1,300 extra houses in Verdun.

However, 1,500 men completely refused any sort of service, believing that in doing so they would be assisting the war effort. These were known as absolutists. Some were granted unconditional exceptions, but many were arrested and handed over to the military. Those who continued to disobey orders were now subject to the law of the British Army. Among these were a group known as the Richmond Sixteen. To punish them for their insolence, the 16 were first imprisoned in Richmond Castle before being shipped to an army camp in Boulogne. Despite being punished severely, they continued to defy orders and refused to work. 15 were sentenced to execution, but after Lord Kitchener's death, this was commuted to ten years' hard labour.

The long-term imprisonment took its toll on the men and many suffered from psychological effects after their release. When they were eventually let back onto the streets of England, they received a frosty reception and struggled in their communities as social outcasts after the glorious victory of World War I. However, their efforts were later rewarded as their experience helped change public attitudes to pacifism and led the way for new reforms in the conditions of prison cells. The stand made by the Richmond Sixteen undoubtedly contributed to the future of the conscientious objectors who would doggedly stick to their guns throughout World War II.



MILITARY SERVICE ACT, 1916

Every man to whom the Act applies will on Thursday, March 2nd, be deemed to have enlisted for the period of the War unless he is excepted or exempt.

Any man who has adequate grounds for applying to a Local Tribunal for a

CERTIFICATE OF EXEMPTION UNDER THIS ACT

Must do so BEFORE

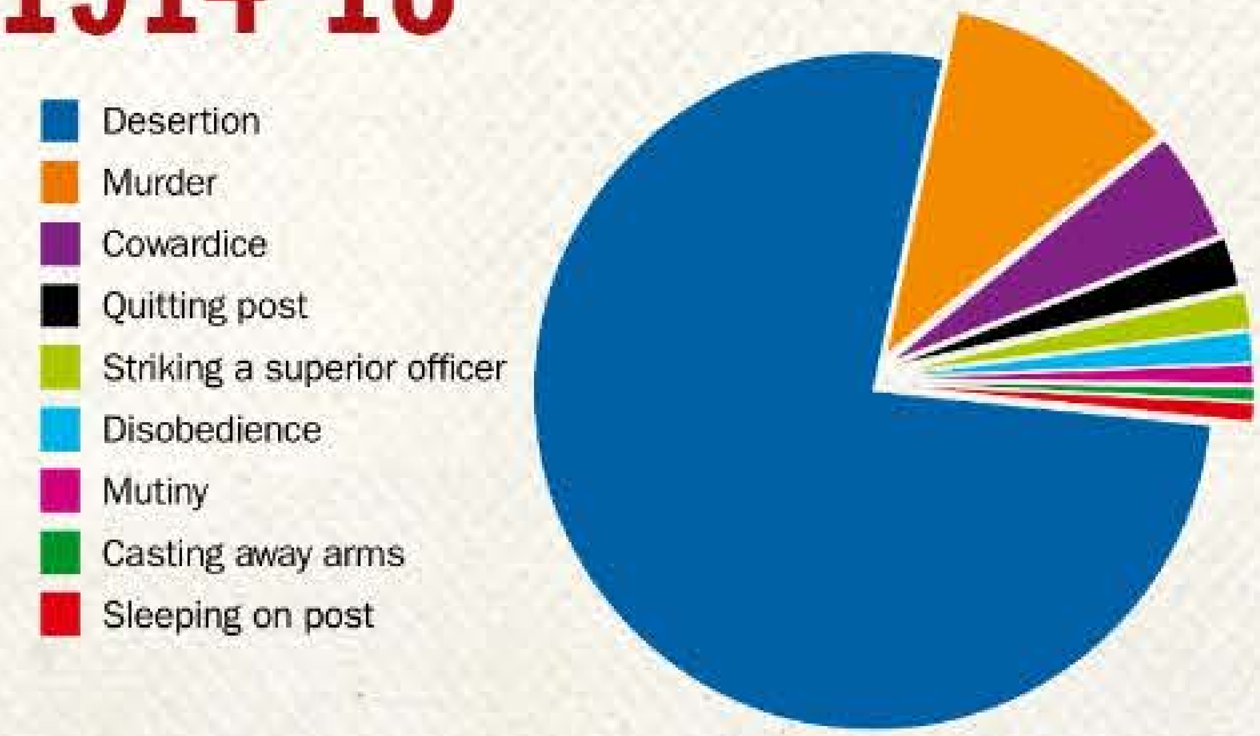
THURSDAY, MARCH 2

Why wait for the Act to apply to you?
Come now and join of your own free will.
You can at once put your claim for exemption from being called up before a Local Tribunal if you wish.

ATTEST NOW



EXECUTION IN THE BRITISH ARMY 1914-18





19 was the legal age limit for armed service overseas

250,000 boys and young men joined up

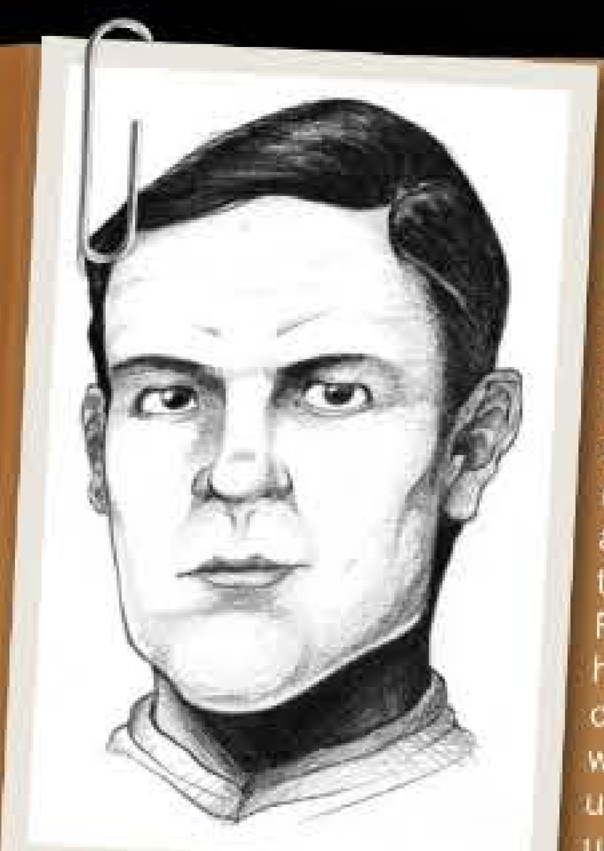
346 British and Commonwealth men executed

80,000 men in the British Army suffered from shell shock





LEE ENFIELD RIFLE Weapon of choice for the firing squads



HERBERT BURDEN

16-year-old Herbert Burden was so determined to play a part in the war he lied about his age and signed up for the Northumberland Fusiliers. Claiming he was two years older than he really was, Burden was undoubtedly swept up in the notion of a long prosperous career in the British Army and the idea that he would give the Hun a good kicking. Ten months later, it was clear that military service was not all it was cracked up to be. After seeing his colleagues gunned down at the battle of Bellwaarde Ridge, he baulked at the prospect of being next and fled. Just like Highgate, his attempt was unsuccessful and Burden was marched to the firing squad. The recovery of this case was the one that kickstarted the Shot at Dawn campaign, which was begun in the early 1990s by World War II veteran John Hipkin.



The 'Bergonic chair' was used to treat soldiers suffering from shell shock with electroconvulsive therapy in World War I



BEYOND BRITAIN

The British treatment of the deserters was harsher than most. The Central Powers gave a little more flexibility, with the Imperial German Army only dishing out death penalties for repeat desertions and the Ottomans much more light handed overall.

Other countries within the British Empire, especially Australia, were also reluctant to follow Britain's lead. At the Battle of Pozières (one of the bloodiest battles Australians served in during the war) absence without leave increased considerably. Senior Australian officials were close to bringing in the death penalty but ultimately decided against it as they understood that men had volunteered for a cause they were not directly affected by. As a substitute for execution, the names of all the deserters were published in the Australian press and the sanctions never got worse than this. Unlike its allies France and Italy, however, Britain was never accused of the cruel Ancient Roman practice of decimation, where every tenth person in a unit was killed as a punishment for repeated desertion.

"BRITISH TREATMENT OF DESERTERS WAS HARSH"



WILLIAM JOSEPH STONES

With a desertion story that is quite different from those of the young privates Highgate and Burden, Sergeant Joe Stones of the Durham Light Infantry was known by his fellow soldiers and his commanding officers as a man of immense bravery. A married man with two daughters, Stones had quickly risen up the ranks and was a veteran of the Battle of the Somme. After what was to follow, however, he would be deemed a deserter. On the night of 25 November, his battalion was helping hold a section of the front line. Stones and his superior, Lieutenant Mundy, were ambushed, resulting in Mundy being killed. Now on his own, Stones ran for his life, and to prevent the soldiers advancing any further, he wedged his non-functional rifle across the narrow part of a trench to slow down his pursuers. Tragically, this was actually deemed as casting away arms by his superiors. He was arrested in January 1917, and soon after executed.



THE WHITE FEATHER CAMPAIGN

It wasn't just the government who were putting pressure on the conscientious objectors to join the ranks. The Order of the White Feather was started by Admiral Charles Fitzgerald and involved the handing out of white feathers by women to the men who chose not to fight. The shame and insult of receiving one of these did spur men to join the army, but also had the adverse effect of persuading those who were clearly unsuited to sign up to do so.

"On my way to work one morning a group of women surrounded me. They started shouting and yelling at me, calling me all sorts of names for not being a soldier! Do you know what they did? They struck a white feather in my coat, meaning I was a coward. Oh, I did feel dreadful, so ashamed."

James Lovegrove on the guilt caused by the Order of the White Feather





The Shot at Dawn memorial was modelled on the likeness of Herbert Burden, who was 17 when he was executed

THE ROAD TO THE SHOT AT DAWN CAMPAIGN

The military death penalty for cowardice and desertion was abolished in 1930, but that did little to change opinion on the morality of the executions. For decades the Ministry of Defence bluntly refused to reopen the court martial files, warning that, "There are lots of problems with second-guessing the reasoning behind these actions from today's standpoint. Anyone over the age of 14 was deemed legally responsible for his actions and army regulations provided no immunity from military law for an underage soldier. A blanket pardon is impossible because all the cases were different. It would be very difficult to review each case separately because in 80 years a lot of the papers have disappeared."

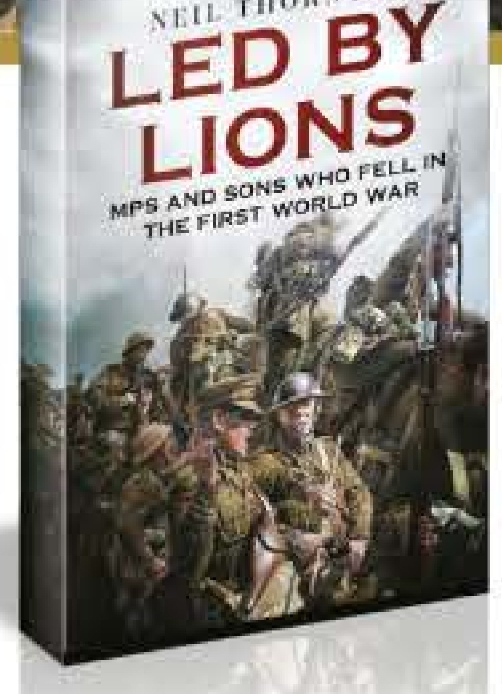
Finally, 75 years after the end of the war, transcripts were made public due to pressure from the media and the Shot at Dawn campaign. On 8 November 2006, 306 of the men were granted a pardon, making Britain the last country in the world to do so. Their names were added to official war memorials and a monument was erected in Staffordshire, finally giving honour to the soldiers who were let down with the worst of consequences.

"I HAVE HAD A LOT OF TROUBLE AT HOME, AND MY NERVES ARE BADLY UPSET. MY FATHER IS A PRISONER IN GERMANY AND IS LOSING HIS EYESIGHT THERE THROUGH BAD TREATMENT. MY MOTHER DIED WHILE I WAS STILL IN ENGLAND, LEAVING MY SISTER AGED 13 AND MY BROTHER AGED TEN. I AM THE ONLY ONE LEFT. I HAD TO LEAVE THEM IN THE CHARGE OF A NEIGHBOUR. I HAD NO INTENTION OF DESERTING. I DID NOT REALISE WHAT I WAS DOING WHEN I LEFT THE CAMP. WHEN I DID SO I WENT AND GAVE MYSELF UP. WHEN I WENT TO THE STORE MY OBJECT WAS TO GET A NIGHT'S SLEEP AND THEN GO AND SURRENDER IN THE MORNING. I THOUGHT IT WAS TOO LATE TO DO SO THAT NIGHT. I DID NOT KNOW WHEN THE BATTALION WAS COMING OUT OF THE TRENCHES."

Private Billy Nelson, aged 19, tells his story to the hearing, - August 1916



Image: Chris Collingwood



PARLIAMENT'S SACRIFICE

WORDS TOM GARNER

The 'lions led by donkeys' myth is exposed as just that, as this book delves into the losses felt on the benches of the House of Commons

True to their credentials as leaders, the vast majority of MPs served in the armed forces as officers during WWI and proportionately suffered heavy casualties. 22 sitting parliamentarians died between 1914-18, but the loss of their sons overwhelmingly outweighed their own sacrifices, with almost 90 being killed by the end of the war.

Written by military historian Neil Thornton, *Led By Lions* dispels the popular belief that Britain's politicians sat in safety while they heartlessly sent the nation's youth to their deaths. The prime minister, chancellor of the exchequer and Speaker of the House of Commons all lost sons, and many MPs who died were noted for their extreme bravery, such as Thomas Agar-Robartes, who was recommended for the Victoria Cross. Such gallantry is at odds with the popular perception of ordinary British soldiers being 'lions led by donkeys' and Thornton's book is a timely revisionist take on the price of leadership during the Great War.

The phrase 'the lost generation' is typically used to describe the generation who came of age during WWI and who were lost in their thousands on its battlefields. In Britain the

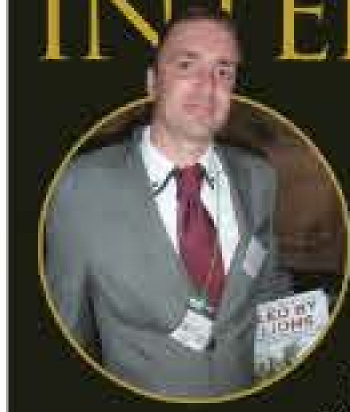


term has a particular resonance, describing the overwhelming loss of the scions of a social class that never truly recovered. While this sudden void in the place of the traditional elite introduced greater social mobility and democracy into British society, we must never forget that these losses represented very personal tragedies for each of the families involved, who rightly mourned their husbands, brothers and sons as the heroes they were.

***Below:** The Parliamentary War Memorial was unveiled in Westminster Hall in 1922 to commemorate the members of both Houses of Parliament and their sons who lost their lives in World War I*



INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR



NEIL THORNTON DISCUSSES *LED BY LIONS*, THE IMPACT OF WWI ON THE HOUSE OF COMMONS AND ITS LEGACY TODAY FOR SITTING MPS

What was the idea behind the book?

The original idea came to me about two years ago. I got invited to Downing Street by my then-MP because I'd done some local project work. The MP who invited me knows a lot about history, and I'd seen something he'd posted on social media about the 100th anniversary of when an MP was killed during the war. I'm obviously interested in military history so I Googled this man, and the story that came up was fascinating.

I read up on more MPs that were killed – mainly through military forums – and they all said the same things like, "Politicians pointed at a map and sent their men there who were subsequently killed. They didn't care and all sat back in the safety of home." But the more I looked at it, there were MPs who had sons who were all serving. I would read comments that would say that the MPs suffered no loss and wouldn't risk anything themselves.

The idea started there really, so I hired a researcher and said, "I want every service file of all the MPs." After reading the files I phoned the publisher to say, "I've got this idea and the reason I'm doing it is to change the public perception." They loved it and said, "Yes, we'll go for it."

What is the meaning behind the phrase that forms the title of *Led by Lions*?

The phrase "lions led by donkeys" refers to more high-ranking officers such as generals. By the centenary in 2014 I found that, while it was great that more people were getting involved and interested in WWI, they hadn't properly studied it and still had the old ingrained myths – with 'lions led by donkeys' being the main one. It keeps popping up now more than ever because of the centenary, and the perception is spreading to lower ranking officers and politicians of the war too. I don't agree with that at all so I'm hoping to stem the perception from spreading. I thought the title would be a punchy way to hit the spark of interest that this wasn't the case.

How devastating was the impact of WWI on the House of Commons?

It was massive. In proportion to the non-political ordinary soldiers, a lot of the MPs and their families were already serving in 1914, particularly in territorial units, and they all went straight over there. The MPs were exempt from active service because of their role, but they went over anyway. Also, with the exception of one or two, every MP or [their] son was an officer and they proportionally suffered higher casualty rates. The consequent effect was pretty much devastating. The prime minister, chancellor of the exchequer and Speaker of the House all lost at least one son, but the MPs or family members are not recognised today.

Is there any biography that stands out for you in your book, and for what reason?

Thomas Agar-Robartes. He was a territorial cavalry officer and he pulled strings because he wanted to go on active service in the Coldstream Guards. When he arrived the other officers had been there for years and worked their way through, while he had just 'turned up' as an MP. They just thought, "Who's this fellah?" but he proved them wrong and they all eventually said that he was one of the bravest officers in the Guards during the entire war. He was ultimately recommended for the VC so he was a standout for me.

What impact would the deaths of sons on active service have on sitting MPs during the war?

Some of the MPs actually broke down publicly during a speech or at an event. A lot of them were rallying for recruitment, but they broke down because they'd lost their sons a week or two before and they were trying to carry on and do their duty. One serving MP's son was killed and he was also a soldier himself. He was once rallying for recruits at half time during a football match. He stood in the middle of the pitch and said, "I don't say 'go'. I say 'Come with me'. I've been over there and I've lost my son, but if I had nine sons I'd give nine."

How important is the story of *Led By Lions* in relation to today's politics?

When we hear and read about past heroes from the world wars people say, "They don't make them like that any more." But I honestly think that if this happened again (although wars are run differently now) it would be the same. MPs would come together and get involved. In terms of MPs' attitudes today it's just that they haven't got the opportunity to show what they would do, and I think that they would do the same now. People might not necessarily believe that but I do.



22 sitting MPs of the British House of Commons were killed between 1914-18

REFLECTIONS FROM TODAY'S MPS

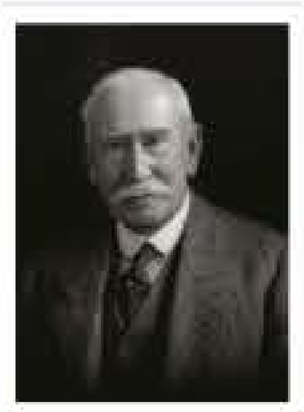
CONTEMPORARY MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT GIVE THEIR THOUGHTS ON THEIR WORLD WAR I PREDECESSORS, SOME OF WHOM ACTUALLY SERVED IN THE SAME SEATS



JIM FITZPATRICK MP

CONSTITUENCY: POPLAR AND LIMEHOUSE
PARTY: LABOUR
WWI PREDECESSOR: SIR WILLIAM PEARCE (LIBERAL)

Can you imagine MPs volunteering for military service today in circumstances similar to WWI?
I wouldn't have thought they would join up in the same numbers but clearly there are MPs who have been members of the armed forces. There are still MPs who are reservists and a number have been out to Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. I would not be at all surprised if there were MPs who would fulfil that expectation. I spent 23 years in the Fire Brigade and am 65 now, but I am sure there are younger members who, if necessary, would want to contribute and 'do their bit'.



Inset, above: Sir William Pearce's only son Geoffrey was killed while serving as a second lieutenant in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment at Fleurbaix on 18 December 1914

What can the example of leadership provided by the fallen MPs of WWI teach sitting members of the Commons?
The WWI MPs are remembered in the Order Paper on the day that they fell and that has also been happening for more recent conflicts, which makes people reflect, remember and pay tribute. The Speaker makes an announcement each day when the business starts to draw attention to the Order Paper.

Whenever there are Remembrance services pretty much all MPs attend to pay tribute to those who gave their lives for that which we all take for granted more or less in terms of our freedoms and democracy. The Merchant Navy Memorial in my constituency is for those who fell in both world wars. The youngest people who are remembered on that were 14 while the oldest was 79. It's important that we do play our part in remembering and therefore it's very much part of the job.



LIZ MCINNES MP

CONSTITUENCY: HEYWOOD AND MIDDLETON
PARTY: LABOUR
WWI PREDECESSOR: HAROLD CAWLEY (LIBERAL)

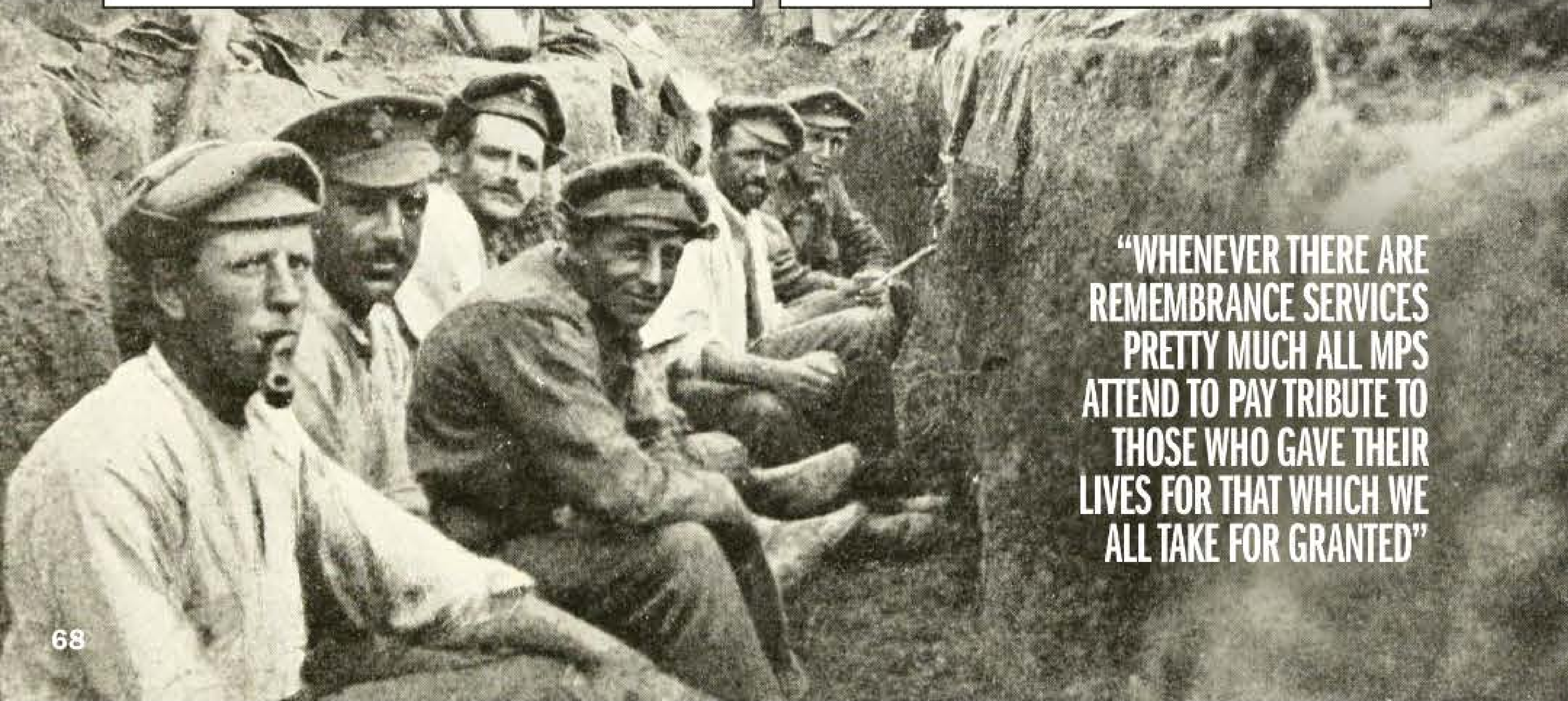
What are your thoughts on Harold Cawley's service, not just as an MP but also a serving soldier?
I can't imagine what it must have been like, particularly the idea that you would serve as an MP and also do active service. Obviously it was very male-dominated back then and the pressure was on young men to fight. I think MPs at the time wanted to lead by example and felt it was their duty to serve on the front line.

What can the example of leadership provided by the fallen MPs of WWI teach sitting members of the Commons?
As an MP you obviously have to show leadership. I personally would be quite reluctant to show the sort of leadership that was shown by our predecessors, but I think they were different times. There was so much pressure put on young men to fight during WWI, and I think we're more sophisticated now in the way we talk about war. However, I do think we have to be grateful for the sacrifices that were made and accept it was a different time and outlook.

We do have current MPs who are members of the army and, although I hope the situation wouldn't arise, I am sure they would ask themselves where their responsibilities lie. Do they lie with their constituents or their country? It's a great example for all of us that MPs were willing to put their lives on the line for the country.



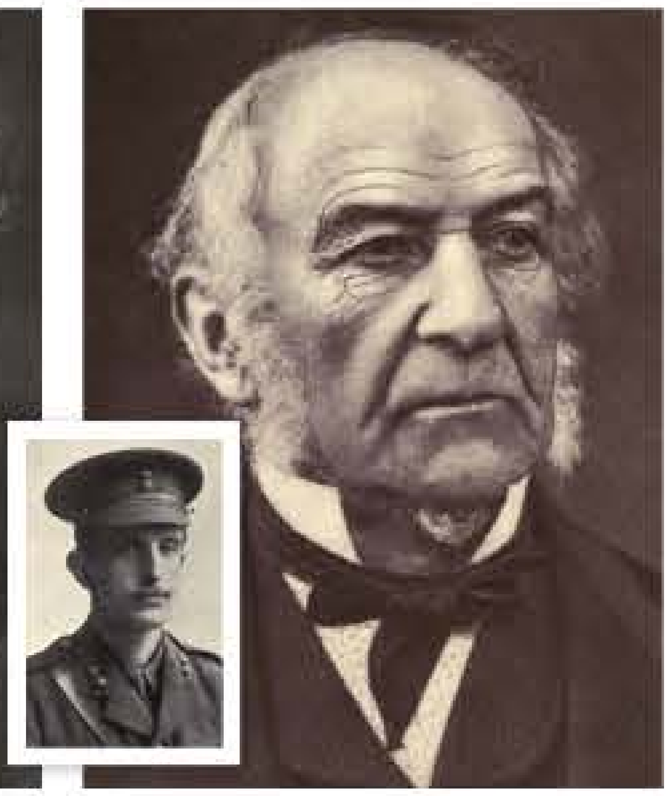
Harold Cawley served as a captain in the Manchester Regiment and was killed during the Gallipoli Campaign on 22 September 1915



"WHENEVER THERE ARE REMEMBRANCE SERVICES PRETTY MUCH ALL MPS ATTEND TO PAY TRIBUTE TO THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR THAT WHICH WE ALL TAKE FOR GRANTED"



HH Asquith was the prime minister who declared war on Germany in August 1914 and served as premier until December 1916. His eldest son Raymond was killed in action on 15 September 1916



William GC Gladstone MP was the grandson of the Liberal prime minister. He wanted to enlist as a private but was advised to become an officer. He was killed near Laventie, France on 13 April 1915



COLONEL BOB STEWART MP

CONSTITUENCY: BECKENHAM
PARTY: CONSERVATIVE

What are your initial thoughts on the book?

I think the book is superb in that it primarily debunks the myth that young officers up to the rank of lieutenant colonel were 'donkeys'. They weren't, they were just as much 'lions' as the men and more so in many ways because they died quicker and in just as much agony.

As a military veteran yourself, does the story have some resonance for you?

The resonance it has for me is the love that soldiers have in combat with all that serve with them, it is paramount and it never goes away. That's why you see so many old comrades associations – not one of them would betray any man who had been in combat with him.

What can the example of leadership provided by the fallen MPs of WWI teach sitting members of the Commons?

Put your country first. MPs are expected to obey three cardinal rules to the state, constituents and their party, in that order. Too many seem to think these days in self-interest so I would say, "Put your country first" and that's why I am an MP.

***Below:** Colonel Bob Stewart MP gives a speech to guests next to Ian Paisley Jr. MP*



"I WOULD SAY, 'PUT YOUR COUNTRY FIRST' AND THAT'S WHY I AM AN MP"



IAN PAISLEY JR MP

CONSTITUENCY: NORTH ANTRIM
PARTY: DEMOCRATIC UNIONIST

What are your initial thoughts on the book?

I think it's fantastic because it's filled this particular void, especially for schoolchildren. Many of them learn that WWI was a disaster and could have ended a lot sooner were it not for bad leadership. But then you actually put yourself in the shoes of the people who were in those leadership roles, such as MPs, and you realise that they actually played a very active role. They made a commitment, gave their service and 22 of them gave their lives, along with almost 100 of their children.

That turns this notion on its head and provokes a review of the history. A historian constantly has to review the evidence and change views, and I think Neil Thornton has very bravely tried to do that.

Were there any biographies that stand out in the book, and for what reason?

The story of Arthur O'Neill was very poignant to me and the Sheehan family was fascinating. I loved the Irish stories because whenever you look at what happened post-war in Ireland their stories become more poignant and significant.

However, the story that touched me the most was that of Andrew Bonar Law's sons. Bonar Law was trying to do his service and run the economy while at the same time losing two sons in quick succession. That story would shed a tear from a stone just knowing what he had been through.

As a Unionist MP, what were your thoughts on the Irish Unionist and Nationalist MPs who fought side by side?

The most magnificent thing regarding the bravery of the men is that they put party political differences to one side. Even though they had constitutional differences they put 'king and country' first. There is a plaque in the House of Commons to the Unionist Arthur O'Neill and also to Willie Redmond, who was one of the leaders of Irish nationalism at the time. I think that tells its own story that they could argue politically but could also fight and defend together.

What can the example of leadership provided by the fallen MPs of WWI teach sitting members of the Commons?

As someone who has sons myself the thing that speaks to me is that the decisions you take affects people's lives. It can also affect your life and the life of your children so you have to make the right decision. That was the thing that struck me the most.



***Left:** Captain Arthur O'Neill was the first MP to die during WWI when he was killed at Klein Zillebeke on 6 November 1914, while he was serving in the Life Guards*



***Right:** Major Willie Redmond was an Irish nationalist MP who was the brother of John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party. Aged 56, Redmond became the oldest MP to be killed during the war*

THE FAMILIES OF THE FALLEN

THE DESCENDENTS & RELATIVES OF WWI MPs PERCY CLIVE AND DD SHEEHAN GIVE THEIR PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR ANCESTORS' SACRIFICES

DAN SHEEHAN & NOREEN STEWART

GRANDSON AND GREAT-NIECE OF DD SHEEHAN MP



DD Sheehan was the MP for Mid Cork and a member of the Irish Parliamentary Party and the All-for-Ireland League. During WWI he served as a captain in the Royal Munster Fusiliers. Although he survived the war his two sons Daniel and Martin, as well his brother in-law, were killed. Two more children, Michael (an officer) and Eileen (a VAD nurse and ambulance driver) were severely wounded on active service but survived.

What was the impact that World War I had on your family?

NS: As well as having the two boys that died and Michael who was injured, the brothers also had a sister who was an ambulance driver and was wounded. Also, my grandfather Robert O'Connor, who was DD Sheehan's brother-in-law, was killed on the first day of Passchendaele so a lot of the family were involved in WWI.

How did the losses resonate in the family in the subsequent years?

DS: It was talked about because we all knew about it, but there were nine members of that family and there was a hell of a lot of fighting going on so it was almost par for the course.

My grandfather was the MP and he was in the 'All Ireland' (Home Rule) group. He was also the initial person who instigated the Royal Munsters in southern Ireland to raise an army because at that time southern Ireland was a bit on the German side as well. When he came back from the war Sinn Fein had been working against him. His house was set on fire and he had to spend three years over in Britain. His sons were allowed to remain in school but they had to go back to England during the holidays. I knew my grandfather and he used to stay at our house, but he wouldn't really talk about the war.

"IT WAS A HORRIFIC WAR AND YOU CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT IT WAS LIKE IN THE TRENCHES"

NS: When the Black and Tans came to Ireland [during the Irish War of Independence] they were going round burning houses. They came to our family house and were about to burn it but somebody said that my grandmother was the widow of somebody who was killed in WWI. She brought out her widow's pension book to show them and so they spared the house, but unfortunately they went up the road and burned down someone else's house instead.

How important is it that stories like the Sheehans' during WWI are remembered by today's generations?

DS: Today's generations have to realise what that generation gave up to give them the life they have had. It was a horrific war and you can't imagine what it was like in the trenches. That's the important thing, we don't seem to have so much respect for the army now and we've had a much easier life.

NS: I've always been interested in it and I was in Passchendaele for the 100th anniversary. I try to pass on the story to the next generation by telling them and nowadays with social media you can post photographs and bring them up to date with the story. One of my nephews is particularly interested, and I hope he'll be the one to pass it on. For me, it's even more important today than ever to work towards world peace, particularly with the threat of nuclear war. It doesn't even bear thinking about what would happen if there were a Third World War.



The fighting at Passchendaele affected the lives of hundreds of thousands, including the families of serving MPs like DD Sheehan



Above: DD Sheehan MP lost two sons during WWI. Both Daniel and Martin Sheehan were killed in air combat

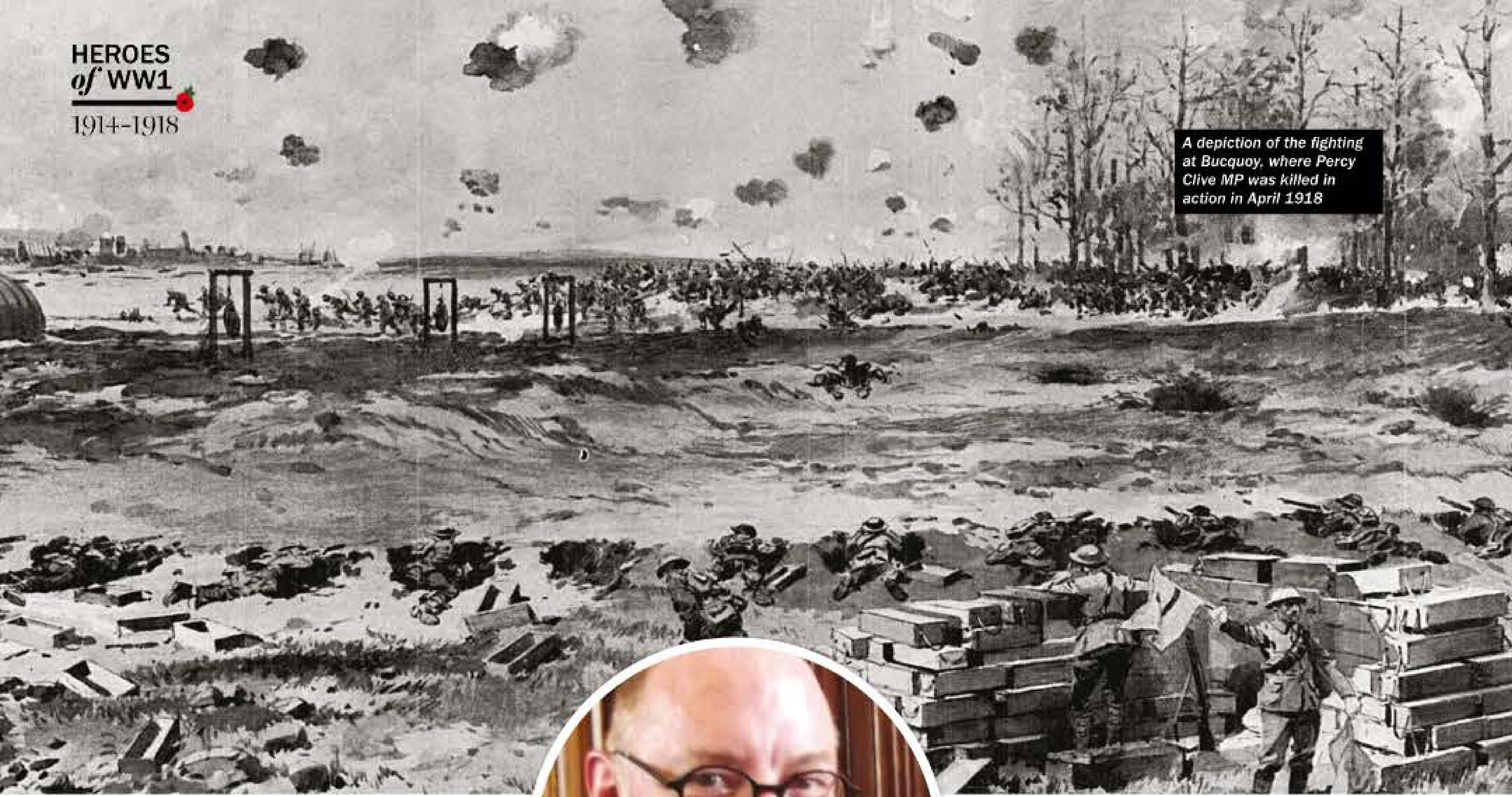


"TODAY'S GENERATIONS HAVE TO REALISE WHAT THAT GENERATION GAVE UP TO GIVE THEM THE LIFE THEY HAVE HAD"

Second Lieutenant Daniel Sheehan was a pilot in the Royal Flying Corps and was killed on 10 May 1917. He was reportedly shot down by the German ace Lothar von Richthofen



RAF pilot Second Lieutenant Martin Sheehan with his co-pilot Second Lieutenant William McCaig c.1918. Both men were killed when their aircraft was shot down on 1 October 1918



A depiction of the fighting at Bucquoy, where Percy Clive MP was killed in action in April 1918

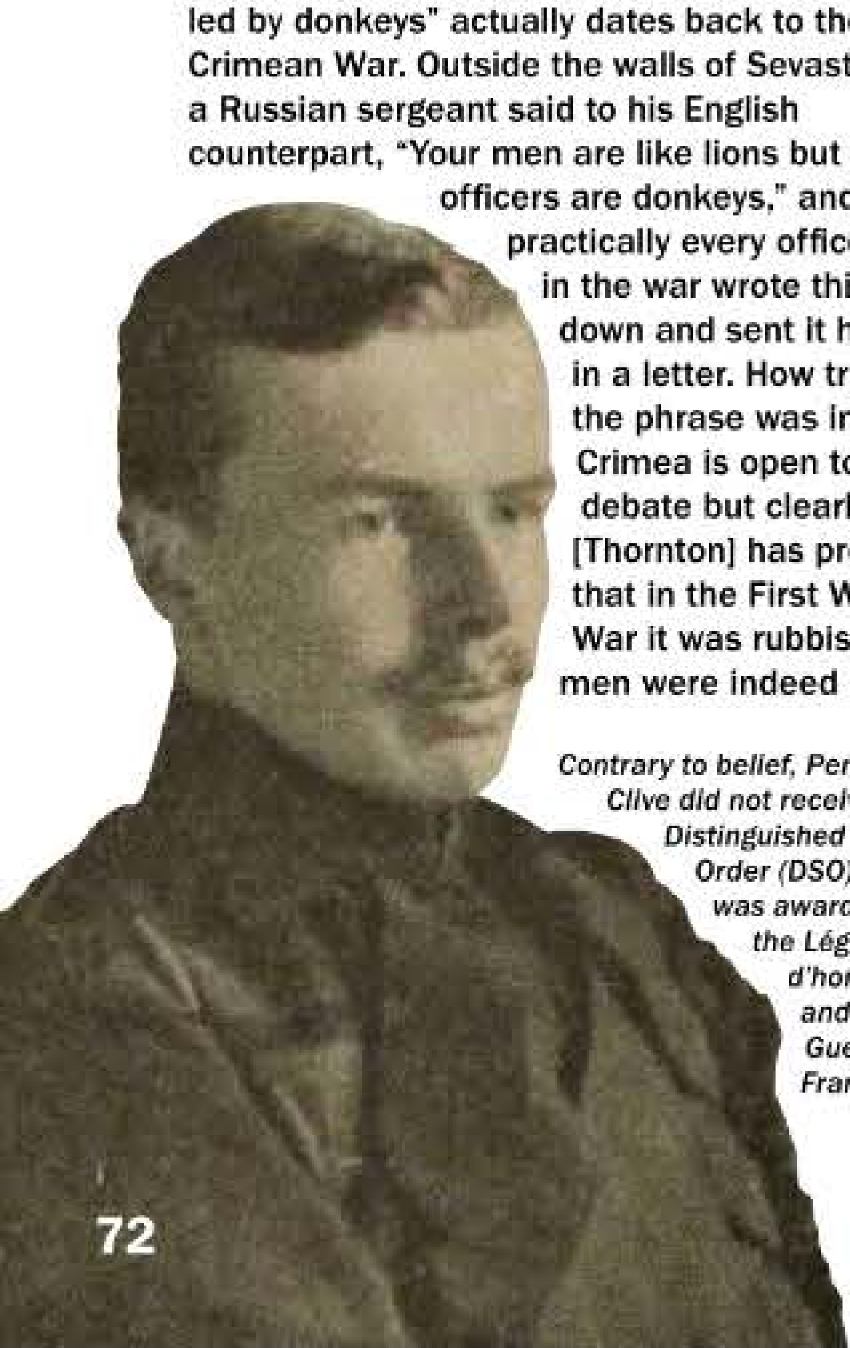


MICHAEL HARGREAVE MAWSON

GREAT-GREAT-NEPHEW OF PERCY CLIVE MP

Percy Clive was the Liberal Unionist MP for Ross and had fought during the Boer War, where he was wounded. During WWI he rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Grenadier Guards, was twice mentioned in despatches and decorated several times. Clive was killed in action at Bucquoy on 5 April 1918. His great-great-nephew Michael Hargreave Mawson is a respected historian of the Crimean War.

What are your thoughts on *Led By Lions*?
I think it's a wonderful idea. The phrase "lions led by donkeys" actually dates back to the Crimean War. Outside the walls of Sevastopol a Russian sergeant said to his English counterpart, "Your men are like lions but your officers are donkeys," and practically every officer in the war wrote this down and sent it home in a letter. How true the phrase was in the Crimea is open to debate but clearly Neil [Thornton] has proven that in the First World War it was rubbish. The men were indeed 'lions'.



Contrary to belief, Percy Clive did not receive the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) but was awarded the Légion d'honneur and Croix de Guerre by France

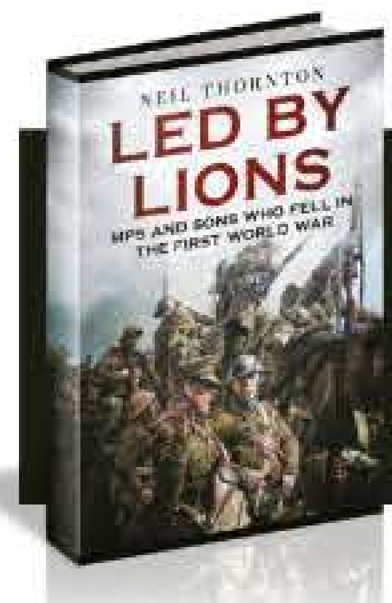
"EVERYBODY SEEMS TO THINK HE WAS AWARDED THE DSO, BUT HE WASN'T, AND NEIL THORNTON HAS TRACKED THIS DOWN AND PROVED IT"

What kind of soldier was Percy Clive?
Percy was killed in action in an extraordinary act of gallantry, which was only one of a series that he had performed during WWI. Practically everybody seems to think he was awarded the DSO [Distinguished Service Order], but he wasn't, and Neil Thornton has tracked this down and proved it. However, it goes to show the way he conducted himself and the scrapes he got into that people came to the conclusion that he must have had a DSO!

How important is that stories like Percy Clive's are remembered?
Percy had a son who went on to be killed in the Western Desert during the Second World War, which led to that side of the family dying out. Ultimately, these deaths led to the end of that entire family.

I think it's very important that everybody's story is remembered, particularly when we're in the political state we're in now. We're inches away from leaving the European Union that has provided us with a peaceful continent for 70 years. I have been reading a lot of WWI military history books over the last couple of years in the context of the centenary anniversaries, but the thought of war is becoming conceivable again as we leave the EU. Our exit from the EU could mean that it breaks up and causes new national tensions to arise. It's a terrifying time now to look back at what a European war means. It's not actually ancient history and could be tomorrow's news.

What can the example of leadership provided by the fallen MPs and sons of WWI teach sitting members of the Commons?
The chances are that in the same circumstances today's House would react in the same way. I don't think there's an absence of leadership in our current MPs and I don't think they need to be taught how to stand up and be counted. But it is always well to look back and say, "These are your peers. These are the exemplars you should be following." However, I don't think we have any pusillanimous MPs or any cowards in the House; they stand up for what they believe in. Jo Cox didn't serve on a front line in a trench but she was out there and she died for what she felt was right.



Led by Lions. MPs and Sons Who Fell in the First World War by Neil Thornton is published by Fonthill Media and available from book stores now.

Images: Mary Evans, Fonthill Media

HEROES

76



92



104



128



140







118

THE KING THAT DEFIED THE KAISER

As Europe inched towards the abyss of war, Belgium's monarch was offered a stark choice by Germany. His courageous actions changed history forever…

WORDS NICK SOLDINGER

On the morning of 2 August 1914, Claus von Below-Saleske, the German Ambassador in Brussels, delivered the following ultimatum to the Belgian government:

Very Confidential

Reliable information has been received by the German Government that French forces intend to… march through Belgian territory against Germany.

It is essential for the self-defence of Germany that she should anticipate any such hostile attack and Germany [therefore must], for her own protection, enter Belgian territory.

This is no act of hostility against Belgium. In the event of Belgium being prepared in the coming war to maintain an attitude of friendly neutrality towards Germany, the German Government bind themselves to evacuating Belgian territory on the conclusion of peace.

Should Belgium oppose German troops, [however], Germany will be compelled to consider Belgium as an enemy.

Just a month before it was issued, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, had been murdered. A pan-continental conflict was now brewing between Britain, France and Russia on one side and Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire on the other. Belgium, whose neutrality and independence was enshrined in international treaties recognised by both sides, and under the guidance of its king, Albert I, had done whatever it could to stay out of it. With war now seemingly inevitable, however, Belgium found itself very much in the way. Germany had already marched into Luxembourg to get its forces within striking distance of France, and – in the giant game of Risk that Germany's Kaiser Wilhelm II was now playing – Belgium looked like it would be next on his list.

"A NATION, NOT A ROAD"

The Kaiser must have figured he was onto a sure thing. By 1914, he'd built an army of around 1.3 million men, and had made no secret of his imperial ambitions. He wanted an empire that matched the might and influence of Britain's, and he'd do anything to get it. And if Albert and his Belgian subjects wouldn't be intimidated into submission, then he'd have to smash them into it. Besides, what serious opposition could this tiny country mount? It had an army of just 237,000 that was, compared to the Germans, locked in the past.

It was true. For years Albert had tried to strengthen Belgium's army. He was no warmonger – he was a deeply moral leader who'd done much to improve the lot of his subjects – but he was no





"SHOULD BELGIUM OPPOSE GERMAN TROOPS, GERMANY WILL BE COMPELLED TO CONSIDER BELGIUM AS AN ENEMY"







German soldiers on the battlefield as photographed during the start of the war in 1914

Above: Albert, pictured in his military uniform, was a favourite of his people

Above, right: Albert's wife, Queen Elisabeth of Belgium, who he married in 1923

Below: The King assumed command of Belgium's army and took the fight to the invading Germans



"GERMAN TROOPS BEGAN SWARMING ACROSS THE BORDER INTO BELGIUM. WORLD WAR I HAD BEGUN"

fool either. The world was heading towards hell and he'd known it for some time, long pleading with his country's politicians to create a fighting force that could protect its borders.

His requests, however, fell mostly on deaf ears. In 1912, his generals told him that, at the current rate of modernisation, the earliest they could get Belgium's army ready for a major conflict would be 1918. War, however, was not going to wait that long. It was now on the Belgians' doorstep with a battering ram and Albert had two clear choices – either cave in or fight.

"Belgium is a nation, not a road," he told his advisors in response to the Kaiser's demands. He then addressed the Belgian Parliament, explaining the situation as he saw it: "If the foreigner in defiance of our neutrality, whose demands we have always scrupulously observed, violates our territory, he will find all the Belgians gathered about their sovereign, who will never betray his constitutional oath... I have faith in our destinies; a country which is defending itself conquers the respect of all; such a country does not perish! It is the moment for action. No one in this country will fail in his duty!" On 3 August, Albert rejected the German ultimatum. The following day the Kaiser declared war on France and German troops began swarming across the border into Belgium. World War I had begun.

Albert was not born to be king. He was the second son of five siblings in his own family, while his own father was the third son of the first Belgian monarch, King Leopold I. However, tragedy and untimely deaths in the family ensured that by 1891 he was heir to Belgian throne. He was just 16 years old, but he took on the responsibility with admirable maturity. Knowing that he would one day be king, he set about preparing himself for the task, not least because the reputation of the Belgian monarchy at the time was so tarnished. In an attempt at imperialism, Albert's predecessor Leopold II had established the Congo Free State in central Africa, and between 1885 and 1908 had literally drained the life out of it for personal gain. He siphoned off a huge fortune in natural resources while his forces killed as many as 10 million people in a string of atrocities that caused international outrage. When Albert eventually ascended to the throne in 1909 he was determined to be different.

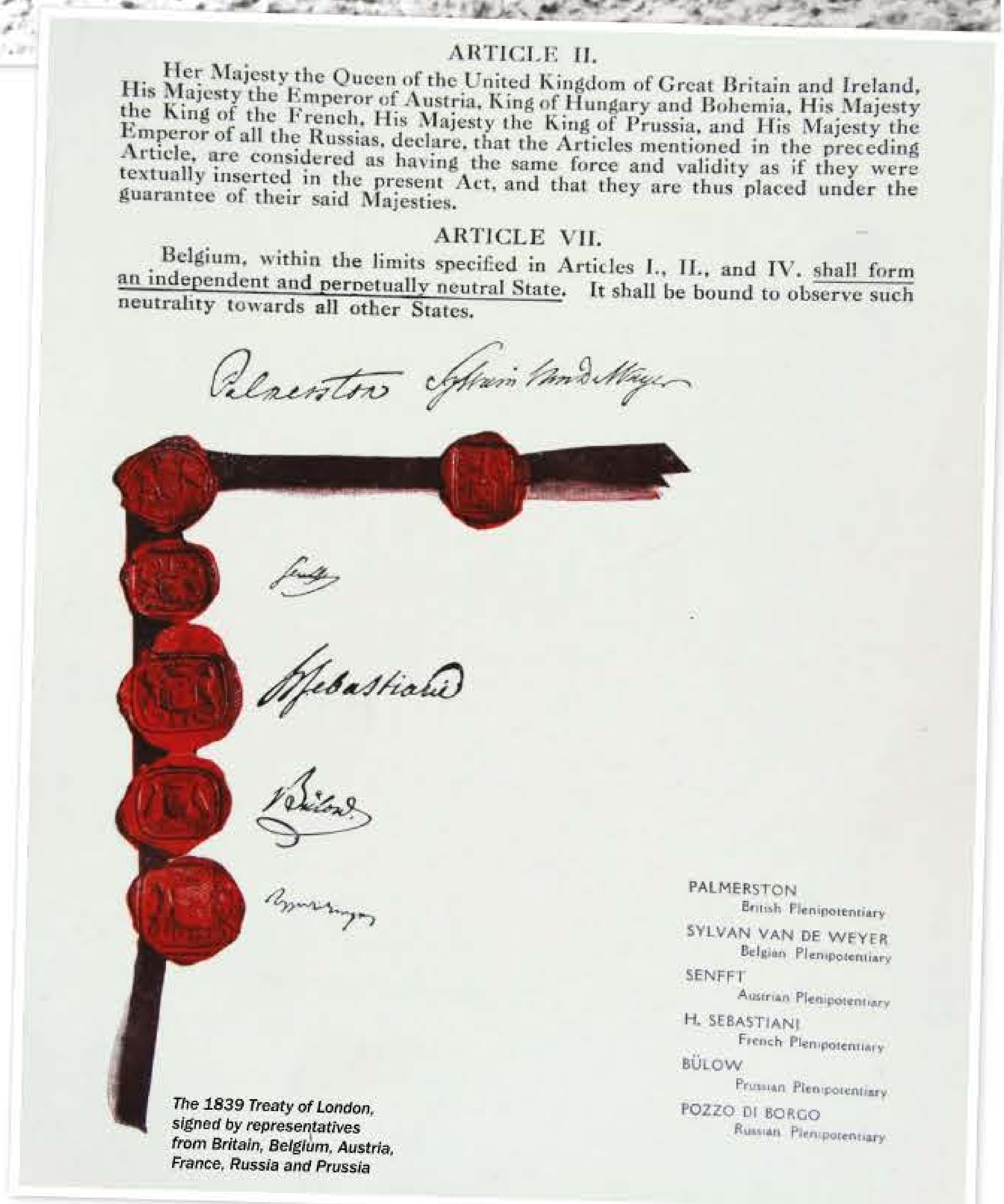
Whereas Leopold II wanted his reign to be remembered for grandeur, Albert was keen to be seen as moderate, hard working and sympathetic to the needs of his subjects. As well as setting a perfect example as a husband and a father, he also set about familiarising himself with every section of Belgian society. He was a deeply religious man, yet one with very progressive ideas.

PLUCKY LITTLE BELGIUM

He began studying the problems of his country's poor and searching for solutions that might alleviate their working and living conditions. He also travelled to the Congo to see first-hand the devastation his predecessor had wreaked, presenting a detailed report on his return home on how the lives of his Congolese subjects could be improved and their ravished country repaired. Albert's commitment to duty and deep sense of right and wrong would find its most powerful expression, however, in the wake of the German invasion in 1914.

Belgium was bound to neutrality by an international treaty and had been since its inception in 1831. If Albert had allowed the Kaiser to use his country as a stepping-stone on his way to invading France, Belgium would have found itself a de facto ally of Germany. The easier route, of course, would have been to comply with the Kaiser's wishes, but Albert was a man of profound principle. Belgium's enforced neutrality





ARTICLE II.

Her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, His Majesty the Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary and Bohemia, His Majesty the King of the French, His Majesty the King of Prussia, and His Majesty the Emperor of all the Russias, declare, that the Articles mentioned in the preceding Article, are considered as having the same force and validity as if they were textually inserted in the present Act, and that they are thus placed under the guarantee of their said Majesties.

ARTICLE VII.

Belgium, within the limits specified in Articles I., II., and IV. shall form an independent and perpetually neutral State. It shall be bound to observe such neutrality towards all other States.

PALMERSTON
British Plenipotentiary
SYLVAN VAN DE WEYER
Belgian Plenipotentiary
SENFFT
Austrian Plenipotentiary
H. SEBASTIANI
French Plenipotentiary
BÜLOW
Prussian Plenipotentiary
POZZO DI BORGO
Russian Plenipotentiary

The 1839 Treaty of London, signed by representatives from Britain, Belgium, Austria, France, Russia and Prussia

A FAMILY AFFAIR

HOW ALBERT'S WIFE AND SON ALSO HELPED TO DEFEND BELGIUM



Albert's eldest son, Leopold, seen here in the uniform of a Belgian army private in 1914

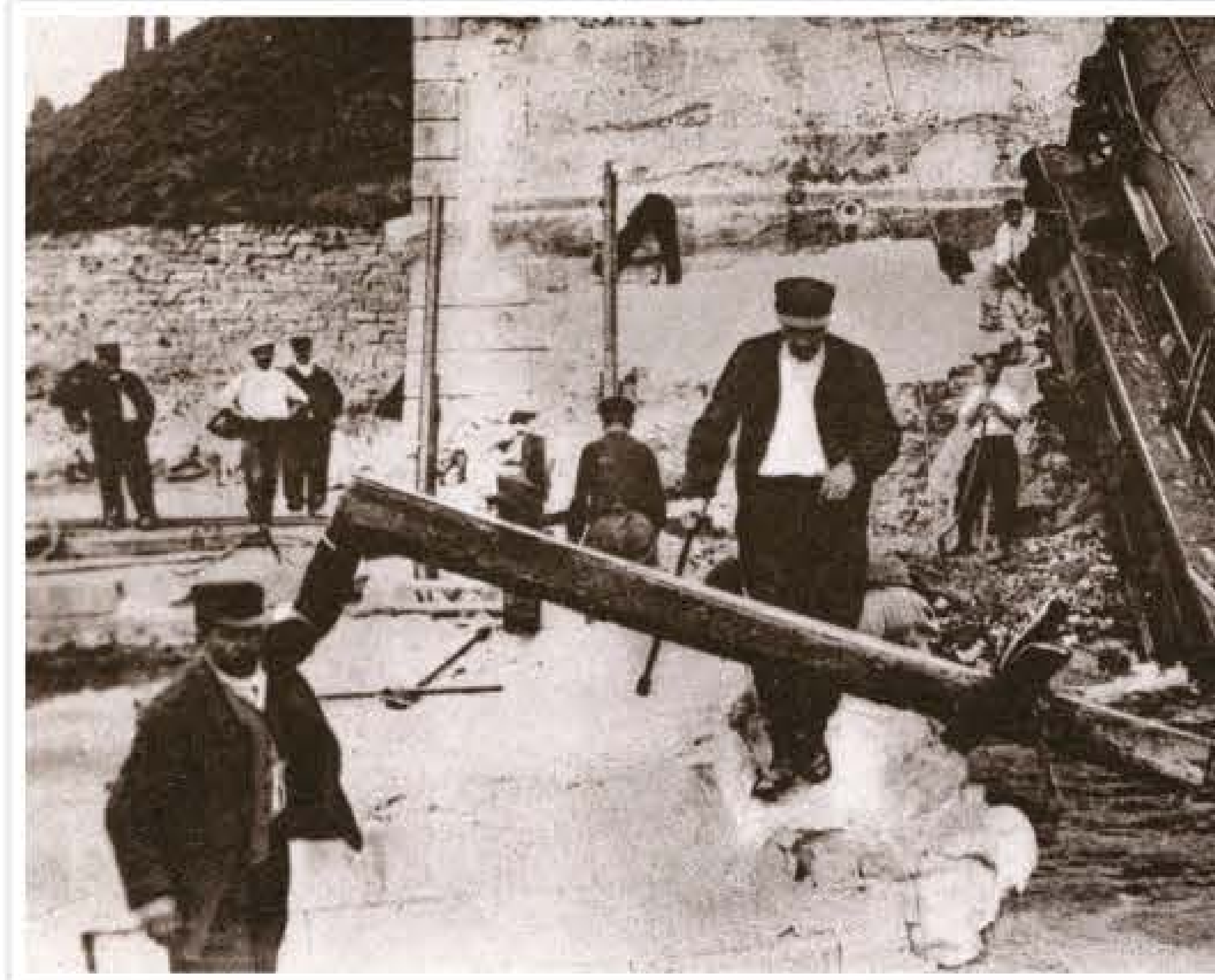
When German forces overran Belgium at the start of World War I, they conquered the entire country save for a strip of land in the country's south-west, known as Flanders. It was to become a cauldron of slaughter, as shellfire and poison gas were poured into it by both the Germans and the Allies on an unprecedented scale. It was here that Albert would spend most of the war, frequently visiting his troops on the front line, experiencing many of the same dangers that they were subjected to.

But Albert wasn't the only member of his family who'd do his bit during the Great War. His wife, Elisabeth – despite being German herself – would also make morale-boosting visits to the Front, handing out cigarettes and chocolates. Her biggest contribution, however, was in helping the wounded. She established a major military hospital in the former Grand Hôtel de l'Ocean in La Panne on the Belgian coast, where she and Albert were based. She actively funded the hospital and frequently visited wounded Belgian soldiers there. She also helped organise a fleet of military ambulances to ferry the wounded between the Front and field hospitals. Hugely popular with the Belgian people, by the end of the war she was known as Queen Nurse.

However, as Belgium was plunged into the worst crisis in its 83-year-history, it was the contribution made by Albert's eldest son Prince Leopold, which was perhaps the most remarkable. Although only 14 at the time of the German invasion, he enlisted in the Belgian army as a private against the wishes of both his parents. He then served at the Front throughout the early dark days of the war. It was only in 1915, after months of combat, he was finally persuaded that – as Belgium's future king – he needed to finish his education, and went to England to continue his studies. The regiment he served with, the 12th Battalion of the Line, is the oldest active in the Belgian army. It is known to this day as the Prince Leopold Regiment in his honour.



Albert visiting troops in the trenches on the Yser



A train fallen from a bridge destroyed in the Battle of the Marne. The battle was considered a great victory for the Allies

"THE KAISER'S SUPERIOR INVASION FORCE WAS RAPIDLY RACKING UP CASUALTIES AT A WORRYING RATE"



was enshrined in law; a law which, as the country's constitutional monarch, he was not prepared to break. With his hand forced, Albert took the extraordinary step of standing up to the Kaiser, even though doing so could cost him his kingdom. Unlike his German counterpart – who'd disappear behind his palace walls in Berlin once the killing began – Albert took personal responsibility for his decision to resist, promising to stand shoulder to shoulder with his people. As soon as hostilities started he assumed command of the Belgian army, and despite the overwhelming odds, began to lead a heroic defence of his country.

The German invasion of Belgium on 4 August 1914 was to have far-reaching consequences. The violation of Belgian neutrality was the excuse Britain had been looking for to join the fight against Germany. And Albert soon found his image being used to whip up support for the war, as the UK press called for an army to be raised to help defend plucky little Belgium and their noble soldier-king, as his own people adoringly called him. Before the first British troops had set foot on the continent, however, the bloodbath was in full swing.

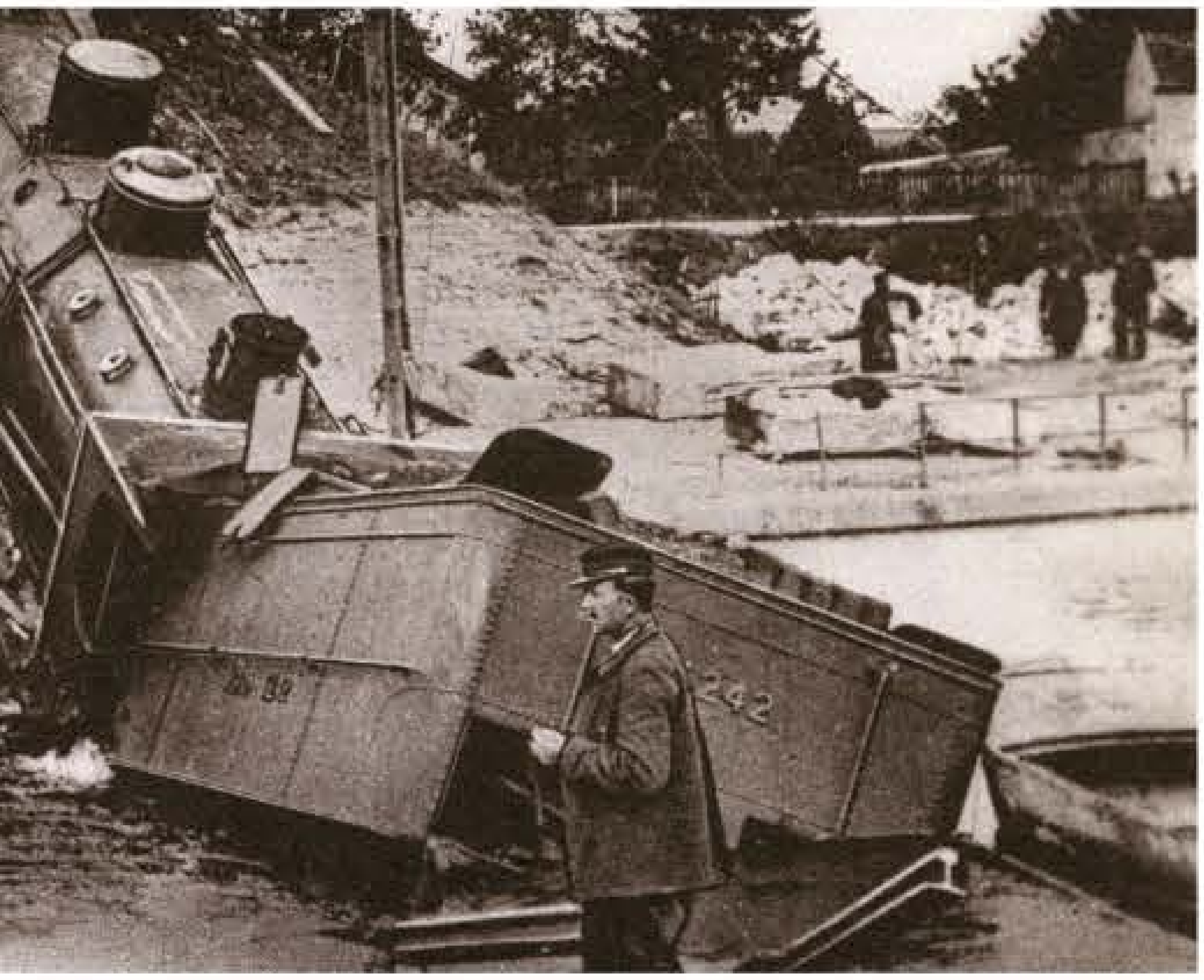
The Germans had forecast that they'd overrun all of Belgium in a matter of days, but Albert had rallied his troops, calling upon them to hold up the German advance for as long as possible. Their response was as costly as it was courageous. On 5 August, advancing German troops encountered their first major obstacle – 12 massive forts that formed a defensive ring around the city of Liège, home to around 40,000 Belgian troops. For the next 12 days this numerically inferior force held out, inflicting considerable casualties on the invaders despite heavy bombardment from German artillery, and the city itself being subject to the world's first-ever aerial bombing attack when it was attacked by a Zeppelin airship.

While this heavy force of around 100,000 were being held up at Liège, the Kaiser's cavalry units raced ahead into northern and central Belgium. Here they met more Belgian resistance at the small town of Halen, where they'd hoped to secure a bridge over the River Gete. When Belgian engineers only partially destroyed the bridge with dynamite, Belgian troops – again outnumbered – took on the better-equipped Germans and managed to force them back.

DEFENCE AND LIBERATION

The Kaiser's superior invasion force was rapidly racking up casualties at a worrying rate against an enemy that, on paper, should have been a pushover. So when Liège eventually fell on 17 August, the Kaiser once again appealed to Albert, imploring him to reconsider his position, to accept his original proposal and to spare Belgium what he called "the continuation of the of the horrors of war". Albert's response was typically stoic. "What does he take me for?" he reportedly sighed.

Infuriated by continued Belgian resistance, German soldiers now began committing atrocities against the civilian population including mass shootings, rapes and the torching of entire villages. By the end of August, 5,521 Belgian civilians had been murdered, while the Belgian army had suffered around 30,000 casualties. They had, however, crucially held the Germans





Like her husband, Elisabeth also visited the troops on the front

up long enough for the French and British to get organised. On 6 September, their forces took on the Germans in what became known as the First Battle of the Marne. This encounter, which lasted a week, effectively halted the German advance into France and marked the start of four years of trench warfare on the Western Front.

By now, the Belgian government – which had abandoned Brussels before it had fallen into German hands on 20 August – had decamped to Le Havre in northern France. Albert, meanwhile, stayed with his troops setting up his headquarters in De Panne on the Belgian coast. German forces now swallowed up all but a small sliver of his kingdom in the far west. And it was here that Albert would remain for the rest of the war, fighting alongside his men – it was rumoured on both sides of the line that German soldiers never shot directly at Albert whenever he was spotted at the Front, as a mark of their respect for a king who'd stuck by his people.

Although he met regularly with his ministers and military advisers, Albert alone took responsibility for all operations in the field for fear that his generals and politicians would try to align the Belgian military too closely with the Allies. Almost from the start, his government had taken the view that Belgium must subordinate itself to the Allied crusade, sacrificing itself to the cause if necessary. Albert, however, was determined that his troops would not be used to further the war objectives of his allies.

For France the conflict was an opportunity to avenge its defeat to Germany in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1 and to recapture lands it had lost then. For the British, coming to the aid of poor little Belgium might have been its official reason for getting involved, but in reality it was all about protecting the Empire – which the Kaiser very much had his eye on. No, the Belgian army's sole mandate, Albert insisted, was to liberate its own country from German occupation and to re-establish the nation as independent and neutral state.

He also refused requests from both the British and the French that he place the Belgian army under Allied command, telling them that he was forbidden to do so on constitutional grounds. His real reasons, however, had less to do with political protocol and more to do with his own conscience. "I alone will be held responsible for my country's misfortunes," he wrote in his diary at the start of the war, and as the horror of the conflict unfolded he did whatever he could to protect his people from its worst excesses. Albert was shocked at the way both the French and British leadership fed the lives of an entire generation into the meat grinder of the Western Front, looking on in horror at the senseless slaughter that took place at Verdun, the Somme, and Passchendaele. Instead of committing his troops to big Allied offensives, which would have wiped out the remains of his small army, Albert employed them in a defensive role to protect the part of Flanders they still controlled and the vital seaports they held.

For Albert the priority wasn't just to hold the line. He was desperate to liberate his people. But as the war ground on he began to have serious doubts that a military solution would work, harbouring fears that his entire country might be laid to waste by the Allies as they pursued their stated aim of forcing the Germans out of Belgium. So he began exploring the possibility of a diplomatic solution, and in late 1915 agreed to secret discussions with the Germans.

The Rape of Belgium was a propaganda series released in the US in 1917



OVEMBER 5, 1917

The RAPE of BELGIUM

AS witnessed by Hugh Gibson, First Secretary of our Legation in Brussels, when the Germans broke through Belgium.

His personal *diary*—the day to day history of all that he saw—can be given you now that the seal of diplomatic neutrality is broken.

The opening instalment appeared in yesterday's Sunday Tribune—a new chapter will be published daily and Sunday for about six weeks. Read to-day's (yesterday's if you can still get a copy), and to make sure of reading all of it leave an order with your newsdealer now.

—NOTE—

This remarkable story will appear daily and Sunday in The Tribune over a period of about six weeks. The Tribune's Circulation Department will receive subscriptions for the length of the story, and will mail the Daily and Sunday Tribune during its run for the special price of $1.25. This is a real opportunity. Notify us to-day!

THE KING'S MYSTERIOUS DEATH

ACCIDENT OR MURDER? THE CURIOUS CASE OF ALBERT'S UNTIMELY DEMISE

On the morning of 17 February 1934, Albert was driven to Marches-les-Darmes in Ardennes by his valet. The king wanted to tackle a cliff there in preparation for a climbing expedition in the Alps.

The valet waited all day for the king to return, but when it started to get dark and there was still no sign of him, he called on a nearby aristocrat, Baron Edmond Carton de Wiart, and a search was mounted.

At around 2am, one of the searchers got his foot caught in a rope. The king's body was found. The other end of the rope still about his waist, he was bent double at the foot of "a great pinnacle in a little crevasse". There was a massive gash down the left side of his head. He'd apparently fallen 20 metres down a cliff face.

His body was driven to a royal château about 80 kilometres away, before being transferred to Brussels where he was later buried. No autopsy was performed and no official cause of death was entered on his death certificate.

Over a million people are said to have attended his funeral, but even before it was over, wild rumours began circulating that the king had been murdered. Some claimed he was pushed off the top of the cliff by the cuckolded husband of a secret lover, while others insisted the French Secret Service had assassinated him. With the Germans gearing up for another war, the French could ill-afford to have the man who'd once tried to broker a secret peace deal with the Kaiser on the Belgian throne. Despite the mysterious circumstances surrounding Albert's death, no evidence for either theory has ever come to light.


HET LAATSTE NIEUWS
-DAGBLAD-
219.478

De Dood van Koning Albert

HET TRAGISCHE ONGELUK IN DE BERGEN

In een rotskloof te Marche gevallen. – Het lijk eerst om 2 uur 's morgens teruggevonden. – De verslagenheid in het land. – De begrafenis zal Donderdag plaats hebben. – Rouwbetuigingen uit het buitenland

Hoe het Ongeluk gebeurde

De droeve Mare







Albert visiting an aviation base with Messrs Poincaré and Millerand



On the lookout during the Battle of the Marne, a decisive victory for the Allied forces

His confidant, Professor Emile Waxweiler, was sent to Zürich to meet with the German diplomat Hans-Veit zu Toerring-Jettenbach, who also just happened to be Albert's brother-in-law. Albert wasn't interested in creating a separate peace with Germany, but he was keen to know what it would take to restore Belgium's independence and territorial integrity. If Belgium didn't need liberating, he figured, the Allies primary excuse for fighting would no longer exist and maybe, just maybe, all sides could be persuaded to sit around a negotiating table. His hopes, however, were short lived. Waxweiler was killed in a traffic accident in May 1916, and attempts to find a replacement capable of conducting such sensitive negotiations failed largely because his own government had now completely sided with the Allies in the belief that the war must be fought to the bitter end.

As the war raged on and the death toll spiralled, a desperate Albert now made his desire for a peaceful solution to be sought known to his French and British allies. But they were having none of it. The war would be won by crushing Germany, whatever the cost, and his arguments were dismissed as defeatist.

Albert never got the peaceful solution he believed possible, but he stayed true to his principles throughout the war and his army was spared participation in offensive operations. Only at the end of September 1918, as the Allies geared up for their last big push, did he allow his troops to join Army Group Flanders in the liberation of Belgium. Consisting of British, French and Belgian Divisions, Albert successfully led the final offensive, finally freeing his country of German occupation. When he finally re-entered Brussels on 22 November 1918, he was greeted as a hero. The war was over. The Kaiser fled to Holland, where he'd remain in exile for the rest of his days, and Albert had his kingdom back, along with the peace he'd prayed so hard for.

He now picked up where he'd left off before the slaughter had started, looking for ways to improve the lives of his subjects. Before 1918 was even over, he'd helped establish a three-party government and created universal suffrage in Belgium, extending voting rights to all adult males. The following year he attended the Paris Peace Conference where he met with leaders from Britain, France and the United States. Here he successfully argued to revise the 1839 Treaty of London that had at Belgium's birth established the country's neutrality and underwritten its security with promises of military intervention in the event of an invasion. Never again would Belgium be used as an excuse for the great European powers to unleash their armies on one another.

He also campaigned for clemency where Germany was concerned; strongly advising against a harsh, restrictive treaty designed to curb future German aggression on the grounds that it may prove antagonistic. This voice of reason was once again drowned out by a din of angry voices. Yes, Belgium had been the principle victim of the war, and while the Allies had every sympathy for what it had endured, this was no time for forgiveness. This was a time for vengeance. The Treaty of Versailles reflected this, and by imposing its harsh conditions on the defeated Germans the seeds for the next, even more terrible conflict were sown.

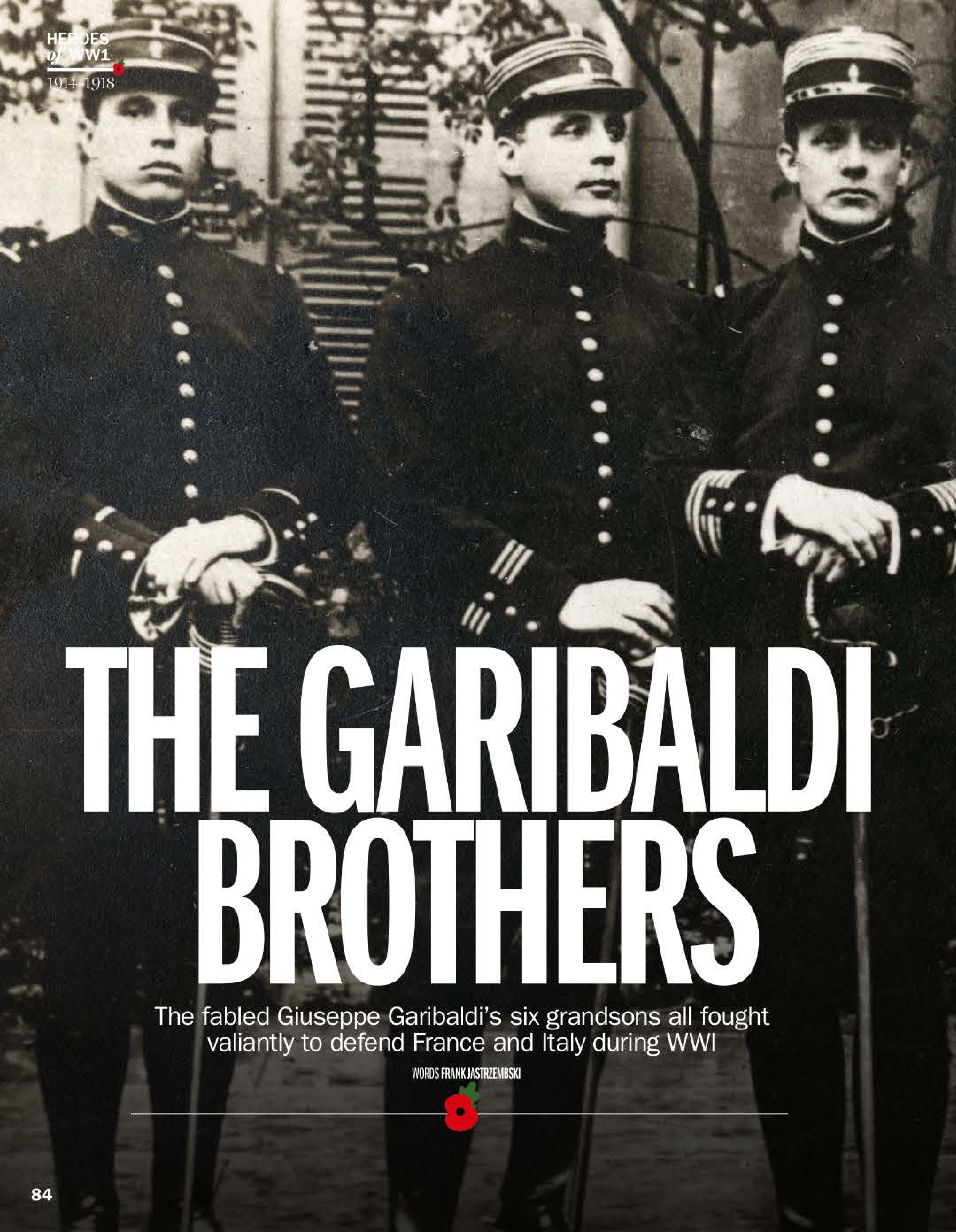
UNTIMELY DEATH

Albert returned to Belgium and spent the next 15 years helping to guide his country through the rebuilding process. WWI had left Belgium shattered and the post-war period saw it blighted by economic crisis and ethnic tensions. Albert helped solve the former by initiating public work programmes to tackle unemployment, redeveloping industries destroyed by the war and, in 1926, the introduction of a new monetary system. The cultural conflicts – which sprang up between Belgium's Flemish speakers and its Francophone Walloon population – meanwhile, were assuaged with beneficent legislation and by Albert's unifying presence as a leader that the nation could rally around. He even changed the family surname in 1920 from the Germanic-sounding Saxe-Coburg-Gotha (just as his relative Britain's King George V had done in 1917) to align himself more closely with his people. Depending on the part of the country he was in he was either Albert de Belgique, or the more Flemish-sounding Albert van België.

The man who had survived so much, however, would not live past middle age. As someone who'd spent his entire life pitting himself against mammoth obstacles, it should come as no surprise to learn that in his down time, Albert liked nothing more than to climb mountains. An experienced and passionate alpinist, the 58-year-old monarch set off alone on 17 February 1934 to tackle Roche du Vieux Bon Dieu at Marches-les-Dames, in Ardennes, not far from the city of Namur, which almost 20 years before had been a major target for the Kaiser's troops. His body was found at the bottom of a steep drop the next day, and when news of his death was announced, the entire Belgium nation was plunged into mourning. The people had lost their beloved soldier king.

FURTHER READING

- T Aronson, The Coburgs Of Belgium, Thistle Publishing 2015
- A Hochschild, King Leopold's Ghost: A Story Of Greed, Terror And Heroism in Colonial Africa, Pan 2012
- Sir F Fox, The Agony Of Belgium: The Invasion Of Belgium In WWI, Beaumont Fox 2016
- D van Basten, History Of The Great War: The Beginning Events, Book 1 The Battle Of Liege, Amazon 2016



THE GARIBALDI BROTHERS

The fabled Giuseppe Garibaldi's six grandsons all fought valiantly to defend France and Italy during WWI

WORDS FRANK JASTRZEMBSKI



"THE NAME OF GARIBALDI BECAME A RALLYING CRY FOR THOSE IN ITALY WHO WANTED TO SEE THEIR NATION ENTER THE WAR ON THE SIDE OF THE ALLIES"

The Garibaldi Brothers. From left to right: Bruno, Ricciotti, Peppino, Sante, Constante, Ezio

Celebrated as the 'Hero of Two Worlds', Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882) is best remembered for leading a series of campaigns in Latin America and Italy. His irregular volunteers – nicknamed the 'Redshirts' for their trademark loose-fitting, blood-red shirts – were romanticised throughout the world for supporting nationalist causes and fighting against oppressive autocracies.

President Abraham Lincoln showed interest in recruiting Garibaldi to lead his armies during the American Civil War, with the hope that he could "lend the power of his name, his genius, and his sword to the Northern cause". Garibaldi's faithful Brazilian wife, Anita (1821-1849), gave birth to four children before her untimely death from malaria while campaigning with her husband. For six decades, men from the Garibaldi bloodline fought around the world to liberate oppressed peoples and to defend republican ideals and democracy.

Ricciotti Garibaldi (1847-1924) followed his father during his campaigns in Italy and France. He took command of a brigade in Garibaldi's Army of the Vosges during the Franco-Prussian War. He distinguished himself at the Battle of Dijon in January 1871, where he presented the captured standard of the 61st Pomeranian Regiment to his father on the battlefield. Giuseppe Garibaldi died in 1882, but the Garibaldi cult lived on through Ricciotti. He issued a proclamation calling for volunteers and led a Garibaldi Legion against the Ottomans during the Greco-Turkish War of 1897 and the Balkan War of 1912-13.

At the age of 67, Ricciotti was too old and crippled from old war wounds to fight when Germany declared war on France in August 1914. Still, he called for Italians to defend French soil against German aggression, just as his father had done during the Franco-Prussian War. He visited England and France to try and raise funds to equip 30,000 Redshirts for service on the Western Front. The name of Garibaldi became a rallying cry for those in Italy who wanted to see their nation enter the war on the side of the Allies.

Six of his seven sons, ranging in age from 20 to 35 – Giuseppe (known as 'Peppino'), Ricciotti Jr, Sante, Bruno, Constante and Ezio – enlisted in the French army. All six of the brothers had received educations at the Methodist College in Rome. World travellers like their predecessors, the brothers roamed the globe, at one time or another covering five continents. When war broke out, Peppino and Ricciotti Jr headed to France from New York, Bruno from his sugar cane plantation in Cuba, Sante from Egypt and Constante and Ezio from Italy.



Above: Ricciotti Garibaldi presenting a captured Prussian standard to his father



Peppino (wearing a tie) with Francisco I Madero (second left) during the Mexican Revolution

Described as being "tall, handsome and looks as if born to command," the oldest and most outspoken of the brothers, Giuseppe 'Peppino' Garibaldi II (1879-1950) saw action as a mercenary in a handful of wars and rebellions before volunteering for service with France. Born in Australia, he fought with his father in the Greco-Turkish War and in the Balkans War. During the Second Boer War (having been convinced by his father to fight for the British rather than the Boers) he carried a sword into battle that had been presented to his grandfather by the workers of South Shields. He next travelled to Latin America, where he commanded Venezuelan and Mexican revolutionary units. Peppino brought this wealth of military experience to France when he arrived in August 1914.

A total of 2,354 Italian volunteers enlisted in the Fourth Régiment de Marche of the French Foreign Legion in November 1914. The men were split into three battalions. They wore the standard French uniform but had a small branch of pomegranate leaves embroidered on their collars. Many wore the Garibaldi emblem, the blood red shirt, underneath their greatcoats.

The age of the volunteers in the 'Italian Legion' or 'Garibaldi Legion' as it became known, ranged from 14 to 60. They came from a diverse range of backgrounds: miners, factory workers, shopkeepers, intellects, artists, soldiers, engineers, chemists, teachers and romantic adventurers. Although they were a diverse group, most fought with the same Garibaldi ideology in mind. The French graciously allowed half of the officers selected to be Italians, and all six brothers were commissioned as officers (Peppino was made a lieutenant colonel and was appointed as the second-in-command of the regiment).

"GIUSEPPE GARIBALDI II (1879-1950) SAW ACTION AS A MERCENARY IN A HANDFUL OF WARS AND REBELLIONS BEFORE VOLUNTEERING FOR SERVICE WITH FRANCE"



Above: Bruno, Peppino and Ricciotti Jr arrive in Paris to enlist in the French Foreign Legion

The Garibaldi Legion was attached to General Henri Gouraud's Tenth Colonial Division and deployed to the Argonne sector (between Champagne and Verdun) on the Western Front in December 1914. The regiment received its baptism of fire in the La Fontaine-des-Meurissons ravine to the east of the Bolante Woods. On Christmas Day 1914, the Second Garibaldi battalion received orders to drive the Germans from their trenches, who were only 140 metres (150 yards) from the Allied lines. The French bombardment began at midnight and lasted until the next morning. The Garibaldis rushed the German trenches, only to find the mass of barbed wire still intact, exposing them to withering machine-gun fire. They suffered the loss of 48 dead and 78 wounded, including Second Lieutenant Bruno Garibaldi, Ricciotti Garibaldi's fourth son.

The handsome Bruno had travelled to England before the war with the intention of becoming a missionary. He instead found himself serving on the Western Front rather than performing charitable work in Africa, Asia or Latin America. Bruno didn't have orders to take part in the Christmas Day assault but chose to join it anyway (abandoning his place with the reserves). He was wounded in the hand and temporarily left the fighting to have a surgeon patch it up. He returned to the front line until he was hit again, still urging his men on. A third bullet struck the 26-year-old officer, killing him. His body was retrieved from the battlefield and sent back to Rome by train.

Despite his father's wish for his funeral to be a private affair, "All Rome paid homage to the

dead hero," one account recalled. Thousands gathered to attend the funeral on 6 January 1915. Old veterans lined the streets wearing their ragged red shirts from past Garibaldi expeditions. Representatives came from the French army to show their appreciation for his sacrifice. Ambassadors from France, England, Russia and Belgium attended too. A red shirt was stretched across the top of the funeral car while French, Italian and Greek flags were draped over Bruno's coffin.

The same day that Bruno's body was being transported to Rome, another Garibaldi fell defending France. On 5 January 1915, the First and Third Garibaldi battalions assaulted the German trenches at Courte-Chausse plateau. Eight mines holding 2,700 kilograms (6,000 pounds) of explosives were detonated under the 0.8-kilometre (0.5-mile) long German trench at 7am. The Garibaldis rushed the German position and secured the first and second trench lines. They were halted at the third line, but not before capturing four machine guns, two mortars and 200 prisoners.

Their success came with a hefty price, suffering the loss of 125 dead and 175 wounded. Among the dead was Chief Adjutant Constante Garibaldi. Remembered as "a tall, manly young fellow, full of vigour and hope," his death came only days after Bruno's. Constante's body arrived in Rome for burial on 12 January. The deaths of Bruno and Constante shocked Italy to its core, but their sacrifice fuelled Italian sentiment towards wider intervention in the war.

"THE GARIBALDI LEGION SUFFERED HEAVILY AFTER LESS THAN THREE WEEKS OF FIGHTING AND MORALE BEGAN TO WANE. THEY LOST ABOUT 600 MEN – 41 PER CENT WERE OFFICERS"

The four remaining Garibaldi brothers continued to see serious fighting on the Western Front. On 7 January 1915 the Germans took the initiative and three regiments launched an assault at 7.30am on the 46th French Regiment, Tenth Division. French reinforcements were rushed in to plug the breach. The French 89th Regiment and the Second Garibaldi battalion charged into the woods and engaged the Germans in hand-to-hand combat. They managed to check the enemy advance and rescued the remnants of the 46th – reduced to about 300 men under a captain. Bloodied in the engagement, the Garibaldis were relieved by the 120th Regiment two days later.

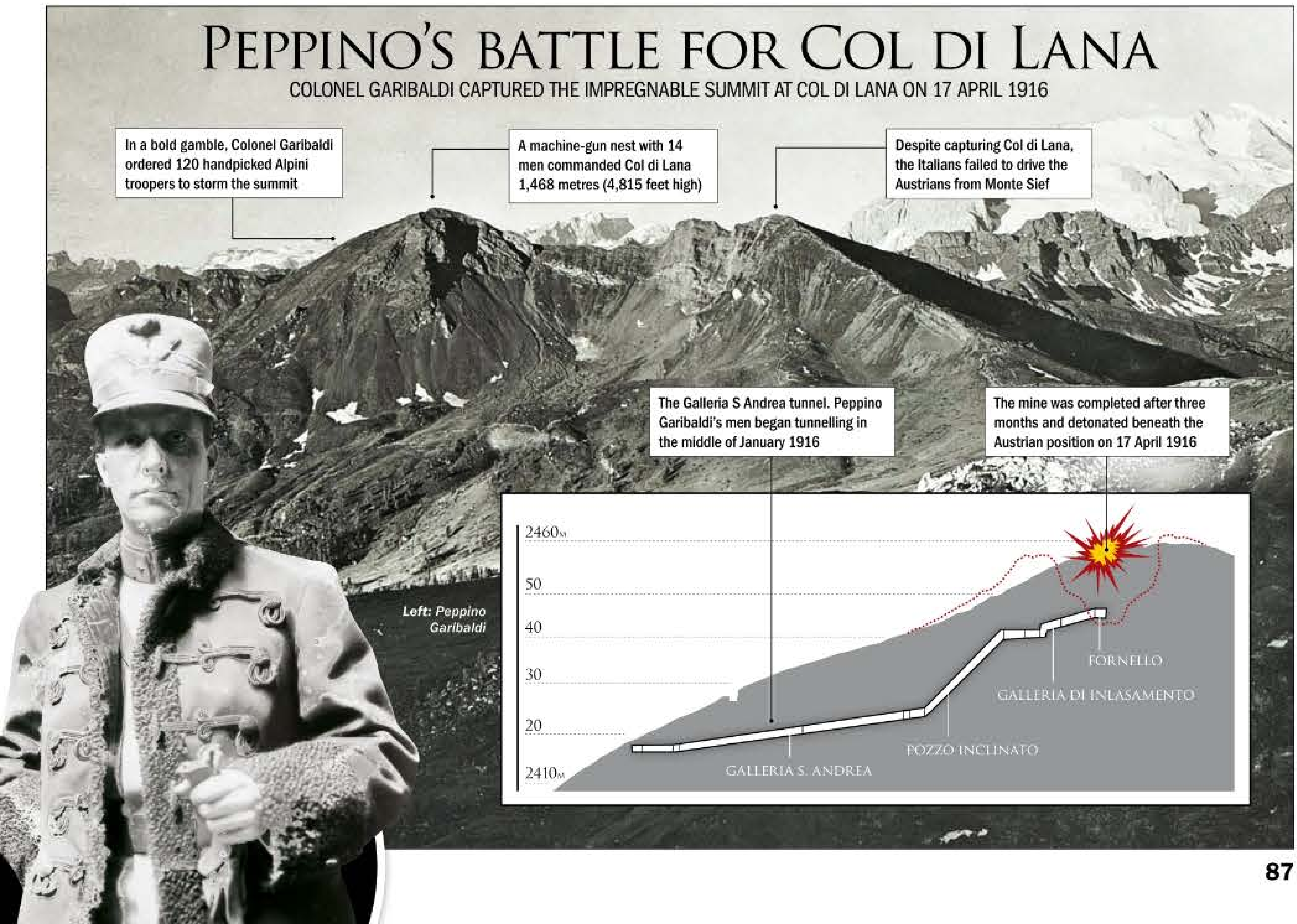
The Garibaldi Legion had suffered heavily after less than three weeks of fighting and morale began to wane. They lost about 600 men – 41 per cent were officers. "The fighting that fell to the lot of the Legion Italienne in January 1915," Lieutenant Colonel Peppino Garibaldi explained, "reduced its numbers to such an extent that it had to be withdrawn to rest and reform." The regiment was pulled from the front line on 10 January. The French minister of war disbanded the unit on 5 March 1915, after only four months of service. Peppino later recalled with remorse that it "ceased to exist except as a glorious memory".

Members of what remained of the Garibaldi Legion volunteered for service in the Italian army when Italy joined the war on the side of the Allies in May 1915. Three of the Garibaldi brothers enlisted. Peppino joined the Alpini Brigade – originally formed by their grandfather in 1859 to fight against the Austro-Hungarian Empire – while Ricciotti Jr and Sante were sent back to the Western Front, distinguishing themselves in the fighting that took place in the summer and autumn of 1918.

The Austrians and Italians fought a vicious war in the Alps between 1915-1918. While fighting for control of the mountains, they also had to deal with freezing temperatures, avalanches and the nightmare of transporting men, artillery and supplies over the rugged terrain. Roughly 600,000 Italians and 400,000 Austrians would die fighting in the gritty battles

PEPPINO'S BATTLE FOR COL DI LANA

COLONEL GARIBALDI CAPTURED THE IMPREGNABLE SUMMIT AT COL DI LANA ON 17 APRIL 1916



Left: Peppino Garibaldi

on the Italian Front. On 12 July 1915 Peppino Garibaldi was given command of a battalion stationed at the foot of Col di Lana mountain.

Peppino had orders to take the strategic location at whatever cost. He appreciated the importance of capturing Col di Lana but did what he could to minimise the loss of life. "It is not in a Garibaldi to sacrifice men for any object whatever if there is any possible way of avoiding it," he wrote. Indiscriminate frontal attacks had led to the destruction of the Garibaldi Legion after only three major engagements on the Western Front. Now he would adopt "man-saving theories" that he'd learned from the Argonne, utilising mines and adopting artillery cover to make less costly assaults. This kind of thinking was still in its infancy on the Italian Front.

Steady pressure from Peppino Garibaldi's men over the summer months forced the Austrians further up the mountain. By the first week of November his men were in control of three sides of Col di Lana, with the exception of the summit. This impregnable position was described by him as a "sheer wall of rock" 200 metres (650 feet) high. A 14-man machine-gun nest sat on top of the cliff, positioned to easily annihilate any advancing Italian units. Just like his father and grandfather before him, Peppino was used to working with less and prepared to find a way to overcome this daunting obstacle.



Left: Giuseppe Garibaldi and his Redshirts, Calatafimi, 15 May 1860

He ordered all of his artillery to concentrate fire on the summit. Once the machine-gun nest was eliminated, he ordered 120 handpicked Alpini soldiers to scale the cliff. They caught the Austrian defenders by surprise, capturing 130 of them in one sweep. The Alpini troopers suffered the loss of only three men. "The apparent impregnability of the position was really its undoing," Peppino would later declare. Capturing the summit was only part of the problem: holding it was another matter.

The Austrians directed 120 guns to bombard the summit. 50 of Peppino's men found shelter in rocky ledges, while the remainder crept over the edge of the cliff and "held on by their fingers and toes". An enemy counterattack that night drove the battered Alpini men back and recaptured most of the summit.

Peppino Garibaldi would have to find another way. He devised a plan to mine the portion of the summit held by the enemy. He selected Gelasio Caetani for the task, as he'd had experience working in mines in California and Alaska before the war. His men began tunnelling in the middle of January 1916.

When the Austrians found out what the Italians were up to, they began to conduct counter-mining operations and concentrated heavy fire on the miners. They bombarded the Italians day and night for 14 days. Peppino directed the operation from his headquarters

"THE AUSTRIANS DIRECTED 120 GUNS TO BOMBARD THE SUMMIT. 50 OF PEPPINO'S MEN FOUND SHELTER IN ROCKY LEDGES, WHILE THE REMAINDER CREPT OVER THE EDGE OF THE CLIFF AND 'HELD ON BY THEIR FINGERS AND TOES'"



The legendary Giuseppe Garibaldi after being wounded in Aspromonte (the wound is visible on his right ankle)



Above: Bruno Garibaldi's body being carried to the rear by his men



Bruno and Constante Garibaldi died in these trenches while fighting in the impenetrable and muddy Argonne



"WHEN THE SMOKE, WHICH HAD LONG HOVERED LOW, FADED AWAY, ONE SAW THROUGH THE RAIN OF ASH THE MUTILATED PEAK"

in a little shed protected by a large boulder. In one specifically hot instance, the Italians counted an average of 38 Austrian shells fired per minute. The frontline battalions had to be rotated every week to relieve them from the relentless strain and hard work.

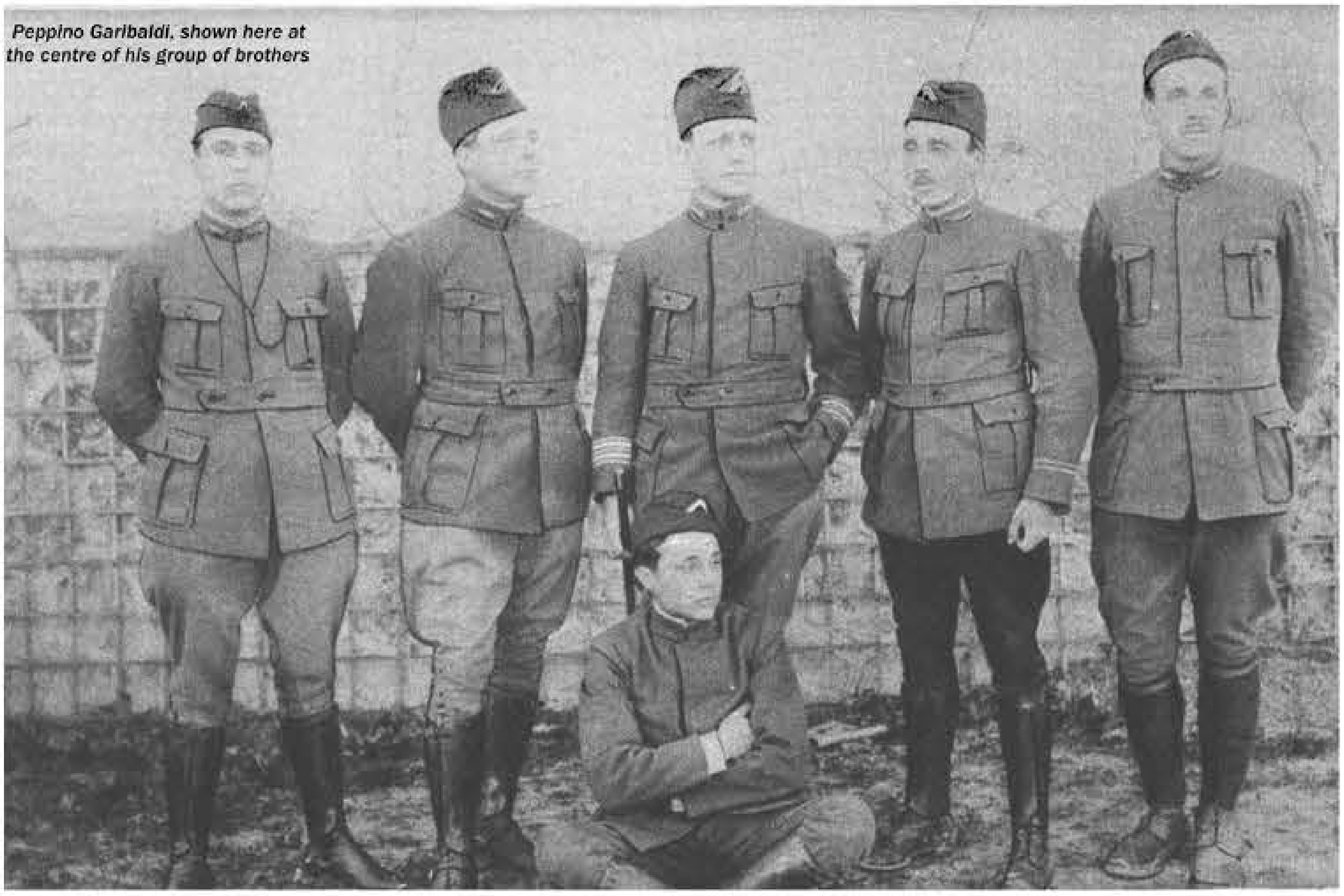
For three months the Italian miners worked in the tunnels until the mines were ready. On 17 April 1916 the mines were detonated, blowing a hole 45 metres (150 feet) wide and 15 metres (50 feet) deep. An Austrian survivor recalled, "The peak of Col di Lana burned like a pillar of fire in the night sky. The mountain trembled and shook. It opened up. It rose. The peak tipped over, lost its shape, broke in on itself together. Here a chasm opened, there another closed. Rocks, snow, earth, human bodies, gun supports, covers, shelters, barracks, steel plates, machine guns flew light as feathers upwards, rained and raged heavily down... Balls of fumes and thick smoke unfolded, rolled before the wind and were driven forward, sank, tattered, dissolved. When the smoke, which had long hovered low, faded away, one saw through the rain of ash the mutilated peak."The Alpini then moved in and reclaimed the summit.

For his valour and excellent service during the war, Peppino Garibaldi was promoted to general and awarded the Légion d'Honneur on 26 August 1918.

The surviving Garibaldi brothers remained influential figures in Italy well into the 1940s. Ricciotti Sr. and Ezio Garibaldi supported Benito Mussolini's Fascist movement (the Italian dictator liked to link his Blackshirts to the famed Redshirts), while Peppino and Sante remained ardent anti-Fascists. Sante offered to lead a Garibaldi Brigade to fight with the French resistance in 1939, but this never materialised. He went on to survive being sent to Dachau concentration camp.

Even today, there is debate in Italy over how much of Giuseppe Garibaldi's myth is fact and fiction. Regardless of the Garibaldi patriarch's accomplishments in his life, his six grandsons valiantly fought in defence of France and Italy during WWI – two sacrificing their lives.

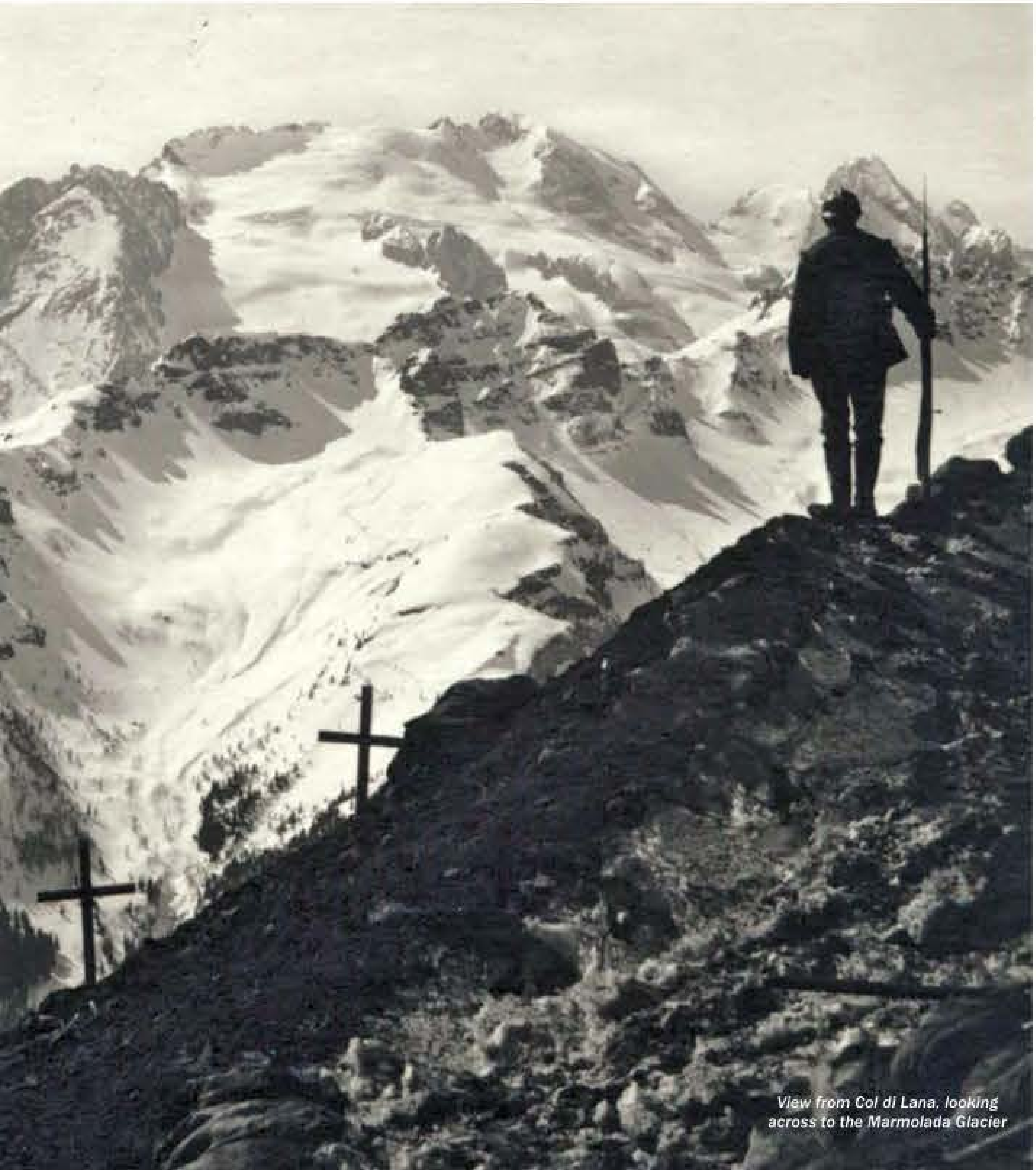
"IT IS NOT IN A GARIBALDI TO SACRIFICE MEN FOR ANY OBJECT WHATEVER IF THERE IS ANY POSSIBLE WAY OF AVOIDING IT"
– Peppino Garibaldi



Peppino Garibaldi, shown here at the centre of his group of brothers







View from Col di Lana, looking across to the Marmolada Glacier

"FOR HIS VALOUR AND EXCELLENT SERVICE DURING THE WAR, PEPPINO GARIBALDI WAS PROMOTED TO GENERAL AND AWARDED THE LÉGION D'HONNEUR ON 26 AUGUST 1918"

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Images: Alamy, Getty

BARON MANFRED VON RICHTHOFEN

Known as the 'Red Baron', Manfred von Richthofen's sharpshooting marked him out as a true knight of the sky during World War I

WORDS **CHRIS FENTON**

Cold, uncompromising and completely dedicated to duty, Manfred von Richthofen's status as one of the German Air Service's elite flying aces was challenged by 88 Allied pilots during the three years he piloted fighter planes on the Western front. These Allied pilots all met the same end; they were shot down. His skill in the cockpit and fearless bravery in leading his men onto the aerial battleground of World War I earned him a lasting place in aviation history. His insistence on painting his planes red to show the Allied flyers that he held no fear also awarded him the title of the 'Red Baron'.

Born into minor nobility in the Prussian town of Kleinburg, the young Richthofen was a deadly hunter of game animals. In fact, he loved nothing more than to stalk prey in the dark Germanic forests of Silesia – one whole room of his parents' house was dedicated to displays of his hunting trophies. It was this craving for the chase and the kill that influenced him joining the German army at just 11 years old, training as an officer cadet at a prestigious German military school in Wahlstatt. He was not a particularly hardworking student though and, as he noted later: "I never was good at learning things. I did just enough work to pass, in my opinion it would have been wrong to do more than what was just sufficient." Despite this apparent laziness, his horsemanship and natural shooting ability meant he didn't need to work hard – the makings of a great warrior were already there.

OVERCOMING AIRSICKNESS

Throughout his career on the Western front he consistently suffered motion sickness but he never let it get the better of him

Befitting his aristocratic background, he joined a famed cavalry unit in 1911, the Urlans, a lancer regiment whose traditional job was to seek out enemy soldiers on the battlefield and run them through with lances. Richthofen didn't have to wait long for his first taste of conflict, with World War I breaking out just two years after he took up formal duties with the Urlans. The trenches were no place for horses though and the cavalry was reduced to a secondary role on the front, frustrating the brash Richthofen. He had joined the cavalry for excitement and the thrill of the hunt, not to sit around in damp trenches being shot at from an enemy hundreds of yards away. The final straw came when he was asked to act as a courier for the infantry divisions. There was no way he was going to demean his honour by acting as a courier – especially to the foot slogs in their filthy trenches. By chance, his unit was stationed near an aerodrome for the fledgling German Air Service and Richthofen was intrigued by the new flying machines stationed there. Perhaps flying would offer him the excitement and glory he desired. He immediately signed up for the risky service and began basic flight training in 1915.

FIRST FLIGHT

His first experience of flight did not mark him out as a particularly talented pilot. He admitted later: "At first we flew straight ahead, then the pilot turned to the right, then left. I had lost all sense of direction over our own aerodrome ... I didn't care a bit where





THE RED BARON

"BY 1916 RICHTHOFEN HAD DOWNED 16 ENEMY PLANES AND WAS BECOMING A LIVING LEGEND"



THE ARENA OF THE SKIES

WWI SAW AIR-BASED COMBAT BECOME WIDESPREAD FOR THE FIRST TIME

Flight as an arena for combat was as unforgiving as it was deadly. Many different pilots had their own tactics for survival, ranging from maintaining height and bearing down on the enemy from above with speed, to simply turning tail and running for home if an enemy with a superior machine came within range. Richthofen's own tactics were simple and easy to learn for the rookie pilots he had in his unit: "I dive out of the sun at him taking into consideration the wind direction. Whoever reaches the enemy first has the privilege to shoot."

Often guns jammed or pilots got separated from their flight leader. In order to avoid these problems, Richthofen made sure everyone in his unit stayed together to try and ensure all his pilots got home safely, living to fight another day. He also ensured that all his pilots checked their weapons before they took off, noting: "Machine gun jams do not exist! If they do occur it is the pilot who is to blame!"

High mortality rates plagued fighter pilots from all sides and the average life span of a pilot was just 11 days, with a pilot considered an ace after he had shot down just five enemy planes. Not only did pilots have to contend with their enemies in the sky and on the ground but mechanical failures were common on all the aircraft flying during WWI as well. In the event of an emergency, pilots didn't have parachutes so all they could do was try their best to land as safely as possible – if they could.

"RICHTHOFEN SEPARATED A FLEEING ALLIED PILOT FROM HIS WINGMAN AND PURSUED HIM AT VERY LOW ALTITUDE"

I was, and when the pilot thought it was time to go down ... I was disappointed." Yet unlike his schooling, he had found something he truly loved and was willing to fully commit himself to: "I was already counting down the hours to the time we could start again." He quickly gained more confidence in the air, stubbornly ignoring the air sickness he frequently suffered from and became an expert shot from the backseat of observer planes. His first kill was an unconfirmed lucky shot from a reconnaissance mission over the Champagne front – he swore it would not be his last.

By 1916 Richthofen had downed 16 enemy planes and was becoming a living legend. His technique and attitudes befitted the qualities of a brash cavalryman: "I approach the enemy from behind to within 50 metres, I aim carefully, fire and the enemy falls ... one does not need to be a clever pilot, or a crack shot, one only needs the courage to fly in close." To Richthofen there was not much more to flying than there was to hunting, noting after one mission: "When I have shot down an Englishman my hunting passion is satisfied for a quarter of an hour."

Richthofen's finest hour came on 16 November 1916 when he battled the greatest fighter ace ever to leave the shores of England, Major Lanoe Hawker. The two met over the fields of Achiet in northern France and fought for no more than 20 minutes, but it was enough time for the Red Baron. Hawker was at a disadvantage: he was flying an obsolete FE2 'pusher' plane with its propeller facing backwards, which made it less manoeuvrable than Richthofen's fast and nimble Albatros D.III. Hawker could not outmanoeuvre his rival and decided to make a run for it. As the two lost height, ducking and diving around each other, Hawker began to run out of fuel and, in a last desperate attempt, swung his plane around to try and meet Richthofen head on – a fatal error. The German peppered Hawker's plane with precise gunfire, scoring hits to the engine and Hawker himself. The FE2 buckled and burst into flames as it crashed to the ground.

TOTAL DEDICATION
Richthofen was noted for his cold aloofness and his total dedication to flying for the Kaiser

SHOT DOWN

Despite the endless victories, Richthofen was not infallible. In the unforgiving French skies of 1917 he was shot down, ironically by a crew piloting the same aircraft Hawker had been flying in their dog fight – the obsolete FE2. Albert Woodbridge, one of the English pilots involved recounted: "I recall there wasn't a thing on that machine that wasn't red and god how it could fly ... I kept a steady stream of lead pouring into the nose of that machine ... it slipped into a spin out of control."

DEFINING MOMENT

Confirmed kill

17 September 1916

Having passed basic flight, Richthofen claims his first official kill over the fields of Cambrai, France, flying with Oswald Boelcke. While on patrol piloting the highly manoeuverable Albatros D.II biplane, his squadron leader spots a group of British planes flying in formation below. Richthofen singles out one of the planes and after a number of ducks and dives finally downs the hapless British fighter. He noted after the encounter, 'I was animated by a single thought: the man in front of me must come down whatever happens.'



Timeline

1892

BIRTH OF THE BARON
Manfred von Richthofen is born into an aristocratic German family in Breslau, Germany. In his youth he becomes a keen hunter and develops his shooting skills, becoming a crack shot.
2 May 1892



HORSEMAN
Richthofen joins the Uhlan cavalry regiment as an officer in 1912. He is widely regarded as an excellent rider and continues to serve in his regiment during the early months of World War I.
1912

WINGS ATTAINED
Bored and frustrated with the limited role the cavalry are playing in the trenches, Richthofen is intrigued by an experimental German military plane and immediately volunteers for the German Air Service.
May 1915

FIRST KILL
Richthofen claims his first kill as a gunner for a two-seater reconnaissance plane over the Champagne front, but he cannot officially claim it as the plane crashes behind Allied lines.
August 1915

FIGHTER SCHOOL
Having served as an observer and gunner with Fliegerabteilung 69, a German reconnaissance squadron, he meets fighter ace Oswald Boelcke, who selects von Richthofen for fighter training.
October 1915

BUMPY START
Richthofen doesn't make a good impression during his initial pilot training and has little feel for flying. However, he is considered an excellent shot and soon grows in confidence in the cockpit.
March 1916





Richthofen managed to make a crash landing but the experience of being shot down wounded him physically and mentally. When he returned to frontline duties a year later his chronic air sickness had returned.

By the beginning of 1918 the Red Baron was back in the cockpit and eager to regain his ace status, now as the leader of Jagdgeschwader 1. His appointment had actually come a year before but his injuries had prevented him from making the position his own. Jag 1 was famously known as the 'flying circus', the original top gun fighter squadron for hot-shot pilots, with Richthofen as their commander and greatest hero. The group were given the best planes the German military could assemble, including the famous triple-winged Fokker D-1 with its superior manoeuvrability and rate-of-climb ability. Richthofen had his D-1 painted blood red, as he did with all the planes he flew, to inspire his own pilots with his daring and to strike fear in the hearts of the enemy.

It was during his time with the flying circus that he set off for his last hunt on 21 April 1918. The quarry looked deceptively weak and ready for the trophy cabinet. A flight of Allied Sopwith Camels was spotted by Richthofen and his circus flying at low altitude over the fields of the Somme. They hadn't spotted the Red Baron's fighter group and, sensing an easy victory, he ordered an attack. They came in hard and fast out of the sun and into the Allied planes, tearing them apart. Richthofen separated a fleeing Allied pilot from his wingman and pursued him at very low altitude, both planes running fast through the low terrain. Richthofen continued to pursue his quarry even to the Allied lines and it was here he came unstuck, as an Australian machine gunner from the ground scored a lucky shot that hit Richthofen in the face. It is still a matter of controversy if the bullet killed him instantly or if his demise came from machine gun fire from the pursued Sopwith Camel pilot that forced him down. Australian soldiers found him in the mangled red wreckage of his destroyed machine and some reports say that before he died he uttered a single word: "Kaput."

Richthofen was awarded full military honours by the Australian forces that found his body – his heroism was renowned even among Allied soldiers. On the memorial wreath the Allied troops inscribed the dedication: "To our gallant and worthy foe." The greatest knight of the sky was dead aged just 25.

NO SURRENDER
The German command asked him to take a ground job because they feared for morale if he was killed. He refused

LIFE AS A KNIGHT OF THE SKY

PHYSICAL HARDSHIP The physical rigours of early-20th century flight were not for the faint of heart. There was no enclosed cockpit and pilots were forced to ply their trade in freezing conditions at stomach-churning altitudes. A level of physical fitness was also required to operate the gears and levers inside the plane and fire the jam-prone armaments.

TECHNOLOGY GAP Aircraft manufacture was still a pioneering industry during this period, which led to varying degrees of effectiveness in the air. The period known as bloody April in 1917 where over 245 Allied planes were shot down was due to the Germans developing the highly manoeuvrable and agile fighter the Albatros D.III, which put every plane the Allies had at a hopeless disadvantage.

HERO WORSHIP The ideal of the flying ace downing enemy combatants in noble combat was born and exemplified during World War I. A strict pecking order of aces developed which often left raw recruits ostracised from their squadrons. The aces themselves became heroes and symbols to the troops fighting on the ground as well as national heroes, advertised on anything from wall posters to tobacco boxes.

MENTAL STRAIN Adding to the physical hardship, the mental strain of flying temperamental aircraft in freezing conditions with little chance of survival if the plane was hit affected pilots terribly during World War I. Violent trembling, extreme weight loss, night terrors and uncontrollable fits and spasms were common among the men of the air services of combatants from all nations.

THE GENTLEMAN FLYER The informal 'gentlemanly' rules many of the top aces lived by reflected the ideals of the 'gentleman flyer.' Ace pilots often only engaged fighters when they had left the ground and were up in the air, in order to give them a sporting chance and ensure it was a 'fair fight'. If a pilot was killed in enemy territory they were given full military honours by the opposing side.

DEFINING MOMENT

Fight of the aces

23 November 1916

Richthofen goes head to head with one of Britain's most famous fighter aces – Major Lanoe Hawker. Hawker was a top gun British fighter pilot who had won the Victoria Cross for shooting down three enemy aircraft during one sortie over Ypes. After a long duel with each pilot trying to gain the advantage, Hawker runs low of fuel and a dangerous chase to the Allied lines ensues. After one last brief skirmish, Richthofen's guns jam but not before he gets off one last burst. One of the bullets hits Hawker in the head, killing him instantly.



WOUNDED IN ACTION
During a confrontation with a formation of British FE2 fighter planes, Richthofen sustains a head wound. He manages to perform a controlled landing but is ill and off duty for several months afterwards.
6 July 1917

THE RED FOKKER
Richthofen begins to paint his planes red from January 1917 onwards, partly to be recognised and partly out of remembrance for his old cavalry regiment. The first plane he paints is his Albatros D.III and then the deadly Fokker D-I triplane.
January 1917



HIGH HONOURS
After shooting down his 16th enemy aircraft, Richthofen is awarded Pour le Mérite or the 'blue max', the highest military honour a German serviceman can be awarded during this period. He assumes command of the elite Jasta 11 squadron the same month.
January 1917

THE FLYING CIRCUS
With countless enemy kills under his belt, Richthofen is promoted to commander of the elite squadron Jagdgeschwader 1. It is popularly known as the 'flying circus'.
June 1917



1918

DEATH OF A KNIGHT
After chasing a Canadian pilot flying a Sopwith Camel over the Somme river, Richthofen is shot and forced to make an emergency landing, dying shortly afterwards.
21 April 1918

OSKAR BRIEGER

While the coveted Iron Cross was awarded to soldiers regardless of their position, decorations for men below NCO rank were extremely rare

WORDS **ROB SCHÄFER**

The egalitarian nature of the coveted Iron Cross contrasted with the awards and decorations of most other German states (and indeed most other European monarchies), where military decorations were awarded based on the rank of the recipient. Nevertheless, officers and NCOs were more likely to receive it than junior enlisted soldiers. During World War I, 5,196,000 2nd Classes and 218,000 1st Classes of the Iron Cross were awarded. The awarding of an Iron Cross 1st Class to soldiers below NCO rank was extremely rare and up to the summer of 1918, only 472 ordinary soldiers and roughly 25,000 NCOs had received it.

The first enlisted man to win the 1st Class of the decoration was Oskar Brieger. He served in the 48th Reserve-Infantry-Regiment, which he was drafted into immediately after the outbreak of war in August 1914. Only a few weeks later, he had earned both classes of the Iron Cross and had received a promotion to the NCO rank of Unteroffizier. In these early stages of the war, this was a spectacular feat, made even more unique by the fact that Brieger was a German Jew, who served in an army ripe with anti-Semitic sentiments.

During the recent fighting near Elewyt-Eppeghem, Gefreiter Oskar Brieger, ignoring his personal safety and under intense enemy shellfire, saved 32 wounded comrades and medical personnel from a partially collapsed and burning building. By doing so, he himself suffered superficial burns and a concussion to the head. Brieger has already distinguished himself numerous times and has only recently been decorated with the Iron Cross 2nd Class for defeating three Belgian soldiers in close combat and rescuing five severely wounded men of his company in the process. With his fighting spirit, bravery and contempt for death, Brieger serves as a glowing example for the men. I recommend rewarding the Gefreiter Brieger with the Iron Cross 1st Class and a promotion to the rank of Unteroffizier.

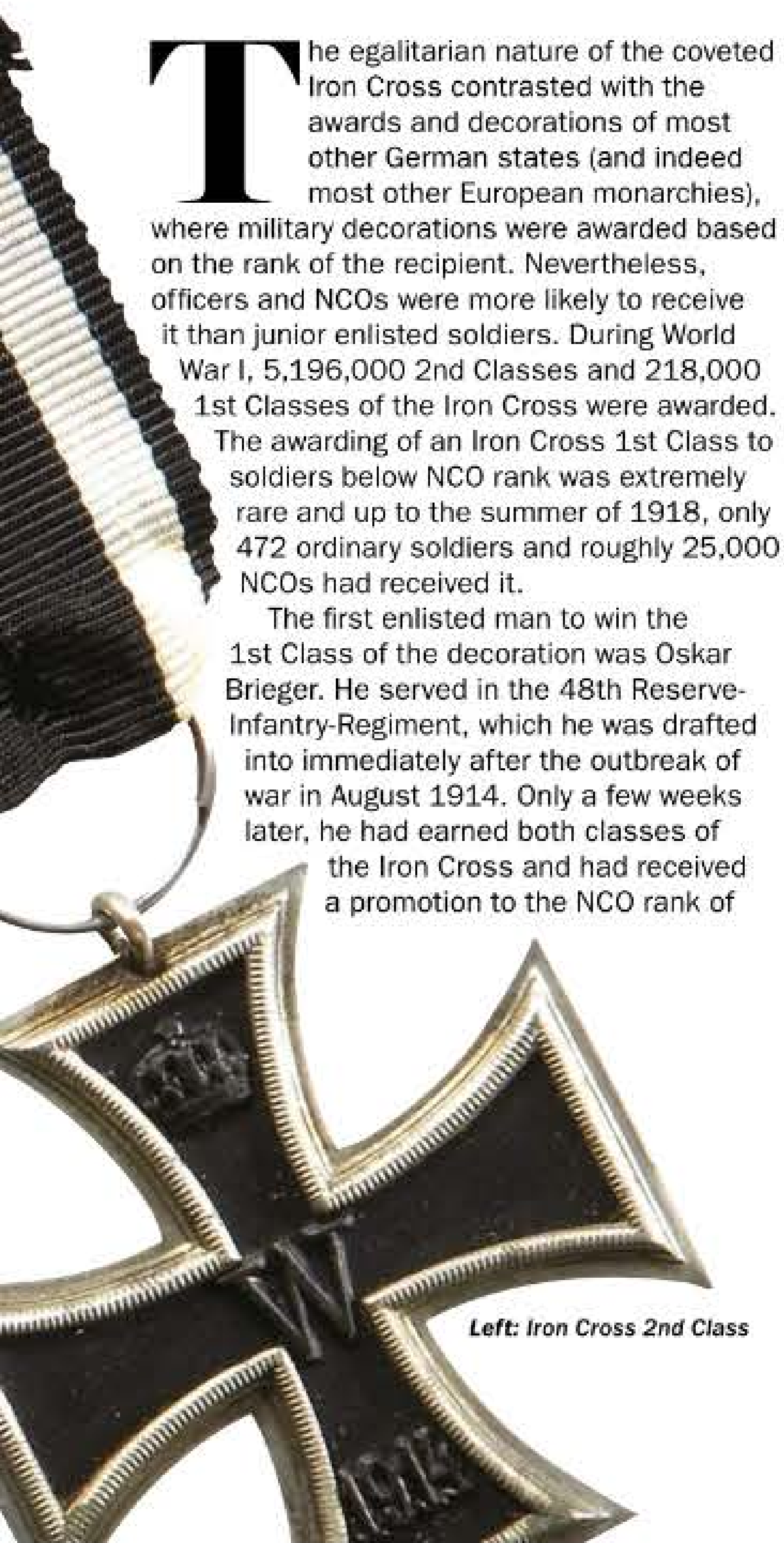
Siegfried Karbe, Hauptmann
Kompanieführer (company commander)

Brieger himself described his actions in a letter addressed to his family in Haltauf (Silesia):

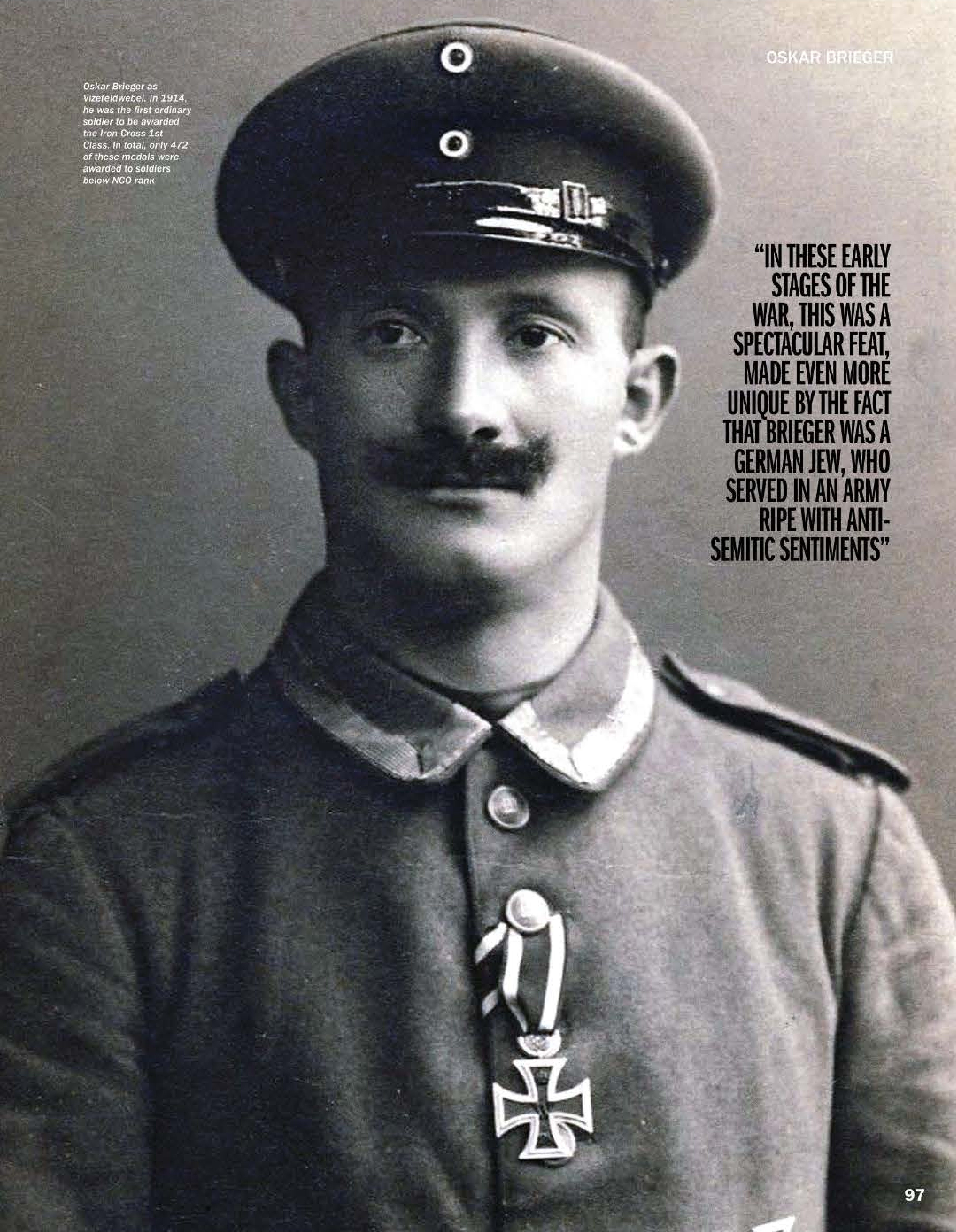
This is how I earned my Iron Cross 2nd Class: On August 25, after an exhausting march, we arrived at Hofstade where we were greeted with a withering defensive fire. Even the civilian population, including the women, had opened fire on us. Many of my comrades were killed. One of the Franctireurs shot the rifle out of my hands and I had to seek cover in a barn.

From there, I could observe a Belgian soldier who was shooting at some wounded comrades lying on a field. I ran up to him and rammed my bayonet into his heart. After having done so, I dressed the wounds of my comrades and carried them back to safety. The Iron Cross 1st Class I earned thus: From 9-13 September 1914 we were in constant action. As we were being targeted by heavy artillery, we set up a dressing station in the cellars of a two-storey building on the other side of a road, next to the trenches. Even though the building had been clearly marked with a red cross, it was targeted by enemy artillery. I carried six wounded comrades

> "I COULD OBSERVE A BELGIAN SOLDIER WHO WAS SHOOTING AT SOME WOUNDED COMRADES LYING ON A FIELD. I RAN UP TO HIM AND RAMMED MY BAYONET INTO HIS HEART. AFTER HAVING DONE SO, I DRESSED THE WOUNDS OF MY COMRADES AND CARRIED THEM BACK TO SAFETY"



Left: Iron Cross 2nd Class



Oskar Brieger as Vizefeldwebel. In 1914, he was the first ordinary soldier to be awarded the Iron Cross 1st Class. In total, only 472 of these medals were awarded to soldiers below NCO rank

"IN THESE EARLY STAGES OF THE WAR, THIS WAS A SPECTACULAR FEAT, MADE EVEN MORE UNIQUE BY THE FACT THAT BRIEGER WAS A GERMAN JEW, WHO SERVED IN AN ARMY RIPE WITH ANTI-SEMITIC SENTIMENTS"



Soldiers of the 48th Reserve-Infantry-Regiment posing for a photograph in the trenches

there and Doctor Leiferstein from Berlin treated their wounds at once.

When a shell exploded near the house, it collapsed and caught fire. 32 people, including me and the six I had carried in, had been buried alive. I managed to dig myself out of the debris and found a door that I had not noticed before. Using a heavy stone, I smashed it in and so made my way into a neighbouring cellar in which I found a cross-barred window facing the road outside. I failed to rip out the metal bars but managed to bend most of them sufficiently to squeeze myself through and to get help from the trench on the opposite side of the road. In that instance, a shell exploded nearby, throwing me into our trench and knocking me out.

When I regained consciousness, I asked the comrades nearby for help, but the heavy artillery fire made it far too dangerous to get out of the trench. I grabbed a pioneer's axe, jumped out of the trench and ran back to the house. On the way, another shell exploded without doing me any harm. Back in the cellars and using the axe, I managed to knock a hole into a wall through which I rescued all the comrades trapped inside the cellar, including the severely wounded doctor.
Unteroffizier Oskar Brieger, Reserve-Infantry-Regiment Nr. 48

Due to the destruction of most service records of the German Army's Prussian contingent during an air raid, it's not clear what became of Oskar Brieger. Some time after his promotion to Unteroffizier he seems to have transferred to the 28th Infantry Regiment. Another promotion to the rank of Vizefeldwebel must have followed shortly afterwards. In October/November 1916, he was registered as having been severely wounded in action. He most probably survived the war, but the details of his fate have been lost in the fog of history.

Despite latent anti-Semitism, Jewish life was an integral component of the cultural, scientific, political, economic and military life of pre-1933 Germany. Many of the things that Jewish German citizens created and contributed to as a valued part of German history and society have been forgotten, lost and destroyed in the





wake of the Holocaust. Among them is the fact that before 1933, Jewish men served without question or dissent in the ranks of the German Army, testifying and proving, if nothing else, their loyalty and affinity to their fatherland.

Approximately 96,000 Jews served in the German Army during World War I, yet, as the war dragged on, anti-Semitism flourished. Jews were accused of profiteering, spying and avoiding military service.

In October 1916, when almost 3,000 German Jews had already died on the battlefield and more than 7,000 had been decorated, Prussian War Minister Adolf von Hohenborn, in what the Zionist Organisation for Germany called "a flagrant abuse of the honour and the civic equality of German Jewry," commissioned a census of Jewish soldiers. His goal was to ascertain how many men were actually serving at the front as opposed to those who were serving in the rear. The results of this census were not made public, ostensibly to 'spare Jewish feeling'. The truth was that the census proved that more than 80 per cent of German Jews served on the front line.

In total, 12,500 German Jews were killed or missing in action, while more than 35,000 were decorated for their bravery. Despite fierce resistance from the aristocratic and often anti-semitic officer corps, 2,000 of them were promoted from the ranks.

The end of hostilities brought little relief. Many Germans blamed the Jews for both defeat and the revolution, encouraging the myth of the German Army having been defeated from within by a 'Dolchstoss', a 'stab in the back'.

After 1933, German-Jewish veterans often hoped their military service would shield them from Nazi persecution, a belief reinforced by their exemption from some of the early anti-Jewish measures. Yet, despite these exemptions the National-Socialists did their utmost to wipe out the memory of what Jewish soldiers had done for their fatherland and to exclude the many German Jews that had fallen in battle from national commemoration.

The image of Jews fighting as patriots for their Germany did not fit into the propagandistic image the Nazis painted of them – a Jew could neither be a German nor a hero. When, finally, in the early 1940s their medals were ripped off their chests and trampled into the mud, it became clear that neither their veteran status nor the sacrifices they had made for Germany would confer them any protection in the Holocaust that was unfolding.

As a German, I went to war to defend my hard-pressed fatherland.

As a Jew, I went to war to fight for the equal status of my brothers in the faith.

Leutnant Josef Zürndorfer, 1915



BLUE MAX: LEUTNANT WILHELM FRANKL

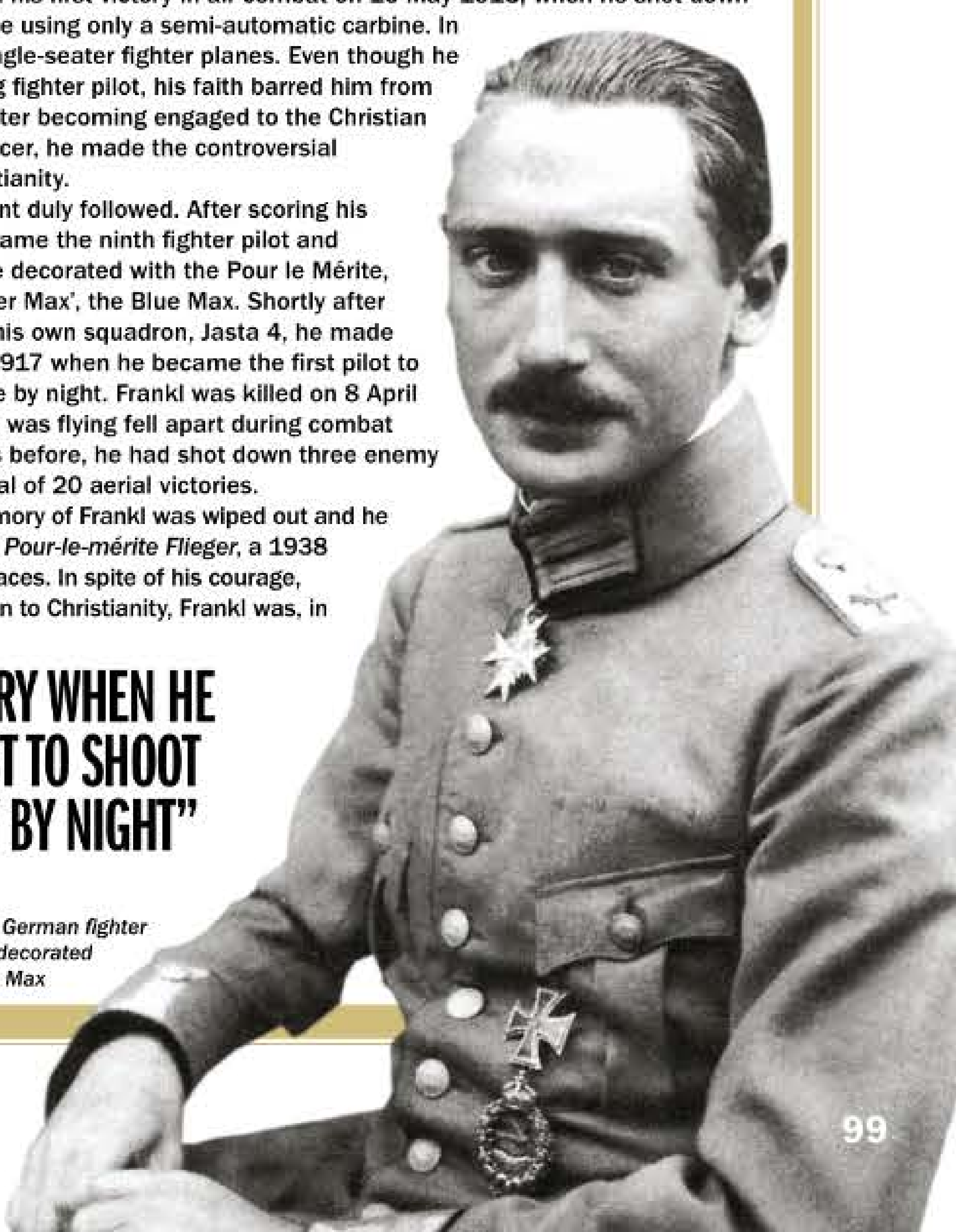
THE HIGHEST DECORATED GERMAN JEW OF WORLD WAR I EARNED HIS FLYING LICENCE AS EARLY AS 1913

In August 1914, Frankl volunteered for service in the German Air Arm serving in Feldflieger-Abteilung 1 and 40 on reconnaissance and bombing missions. Acting as an observer in a two-seater aeroplane, he scored his first victory in air combat on 10 May 1915, when he shot down a French Voisin pusher plane using only a semi-automatic carbine. In 1916, he trained to pilot single-seater fighter planes. Even though he proved to be an outstanding fighter pilot, his faith barred him from becoming an officer, and after becoming engaged to the Christian daughter of an Austrian officer, he made the controversial decision to convert to Christianity.

The promotion to Leutnant duly followed. After scoring his eighth aerial victory, he became the ninth fighter pilot and the only born Jew ever to be decorated with the Pour le Mérite, colloquially known as 'Blauer Max', the Blue Max. Shortly after having taken command of his own squadron, Jasta 4, he made aviation history on 2 April 1917 when he became the first pilot to shoot down an enemy plane by night. Frankl was killed on 8 April 1917, when the Albatros he was flying fell apart during combat over France. Just three days before, he had shot down three enemy aircraft in one day, for a total of 20 aerial victories.

In Nazi Germany, the memory of Frankl was wiped out and he was excluded from the book *Pour-le-mérite Flieger*, a 1938 chronicle of German fighter aces. In spite of his courage, gallantry and even conversion to Christianity, Frankl was, in Nazi eyes, still a Jew.

"HE MADE HISTORY WHEN HE BECAME THE FIRST TO SHOOT DOWN AN ENEMY BY NIGHT"



***Right:** Leutnant Wilhelm Frankl, German fighter ace, was the ninth soldier to be decorated with the Pour le Mérite, the Blue Max*



An Iron Cross 1st Class, award case and package of issue



MICHAEL JOHN O'LEARY

This Lance Corporal in the Irish Guards charged two enemy machine-gun nests singlehandedly while under covering bombardment from his own side

WORDS **ANDREW BROWN**

The men fixed their bayonets onto the tip of their rifles and listened to the rattle of machine-gun fire that hammered incessantly above their heads. The position the Germans held was strong; their troops had already repulsed two counter attacks by the British forces. Many of the casualties sustained in these attacks had been caused by the two machine-gun barricades the Germans had, which were only 55 metres (180 feet) apart. The barricades held five German soldiers each, one to fire the deadly weapon while the others helped feed the ammunition through and pointed out potential targets. The machine guns could spit out up to 400 deadly rounds a minute and their presence on any battlefield during World War I had the potential to alter an entire battle's balance of power.

The 50 men of the Coldstream Guards and 30 of the 1st Company of the Irish Guards had some sappers with wire cutters and sandbags. These men were trying to succeed where the first two attacks had failed. The Coldstreams went first and charged the 180 metres (600 feet) separating them from the German trench. Peppered with fire, their charge began to falter. The Irish Guards rushed to join them and raced toward the enemy, but there was one among them who quickly outpaced the rest. This figure was Lance Corporal Michael O'Leary.

O'Leary was a keen sportsman from an early age, and particularly excelled in competitive weightlifting and football. Wanting more from life than working on the family's farm, he joined the Royal Navy aged 16 where he initially worked as a stoker. After serving for several years, an illness – believed to be rheumatism of the knees – forced him to leave the service and he returned home to Cork. However, he was soon on the move again, joining the Irish National Guard in 1909 and serving with them until 1913. In August that year he emigrated to Canada (a journey that took several weeks) and joined the Royal North-West Mounted Police.

While employed in the Canadian police force he displayed the bravery that would later see him come to international prominence, when he captured two criminals following a long gunfight. O'Leary was commended for his actions, presented with a gold ring and was well thought of by his colleagues. However, he would not stay there long, as at the outbreak of World War I he was given permission to return to Britain to re-join the army. O'Leary and his old regiment, the Irish Guards were sent to the front in November 1914 where they experienced the brutalities and harsh reality of trench warfare.

The Irish Guards were stationed around the La Bassée district in France and were subjected to frequent German bombardments. On the morning of 1 February 1915, the Germans attacked British forces where O'Leary was stationed and pushed them back. The ground they had gained was strategically important – in the grind of trench warfare land was often gained and lost frequently – but this territory had tactical significance and would need to be retaken. The 4th Company of the Irish Guards and the Coldstream Guards attempted to do just that at 4am but the German barrage – including that from their two machine-gun encampments – scythed them down. Part of the company did make it back to their own trenches – some limping, some crawling – but the damage had been done.

O'Leary's 1st Company, under the command of Second Lieutenant Innes, were ordered to organise the survivors of the assault party and assist the Coldstream Guards in a second attempt to take back the territory. The British artillery commenced what was at that point one of the conflict's larger bombardments, in order to break down the barbed wire in front of their trenches. Meanwhile, the 2nd Company fired at their enemy to keep them in their trenches and prevent them from being able to return fire. This last point was important, because the Company were preparing to charge straight at them, despite the heavy fire from friend and foe alike, and the artillery raining down on their target from their own position. O'Leary was about to display staggering bravery.

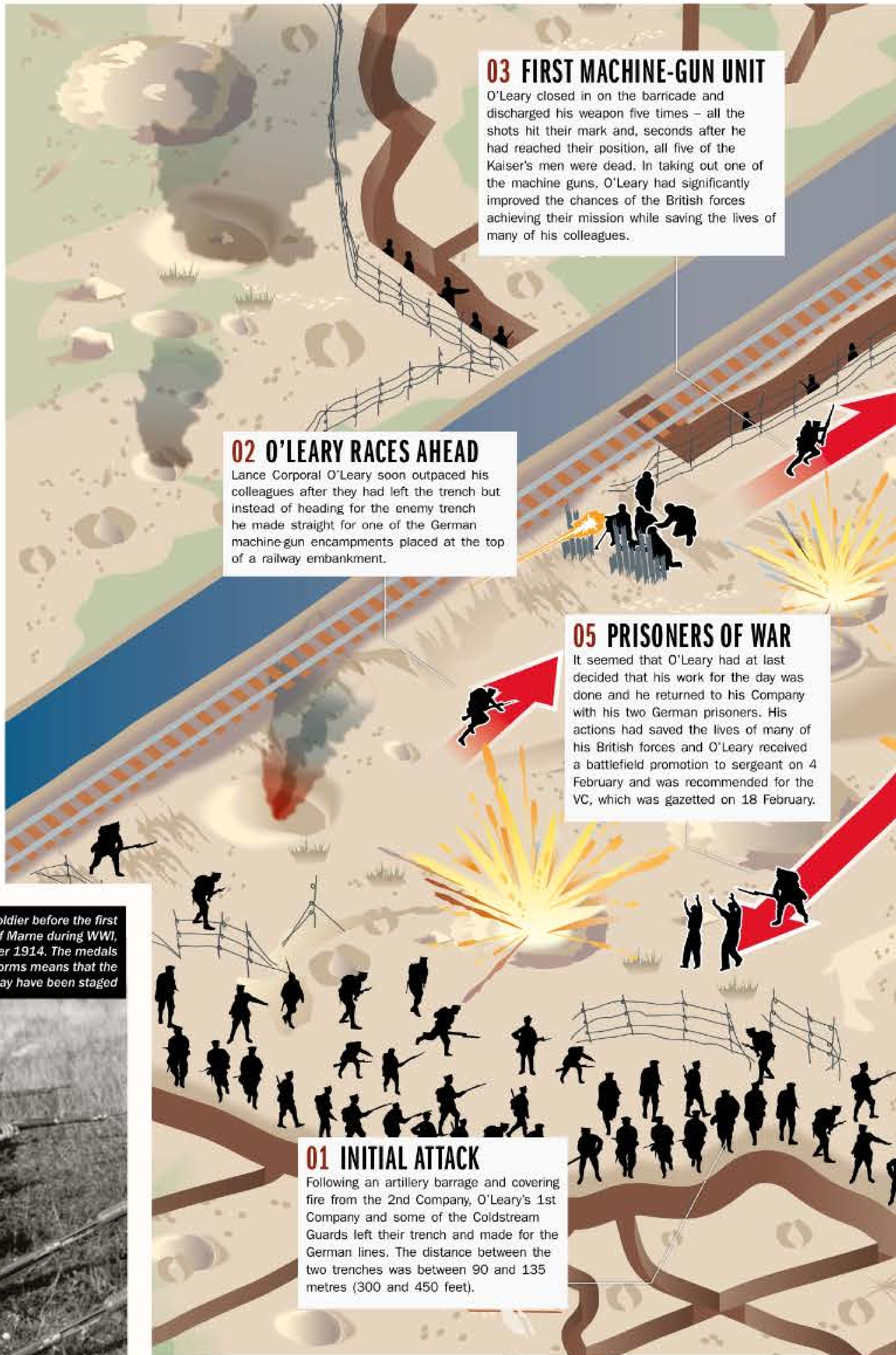
PRAISE FOR A HERO

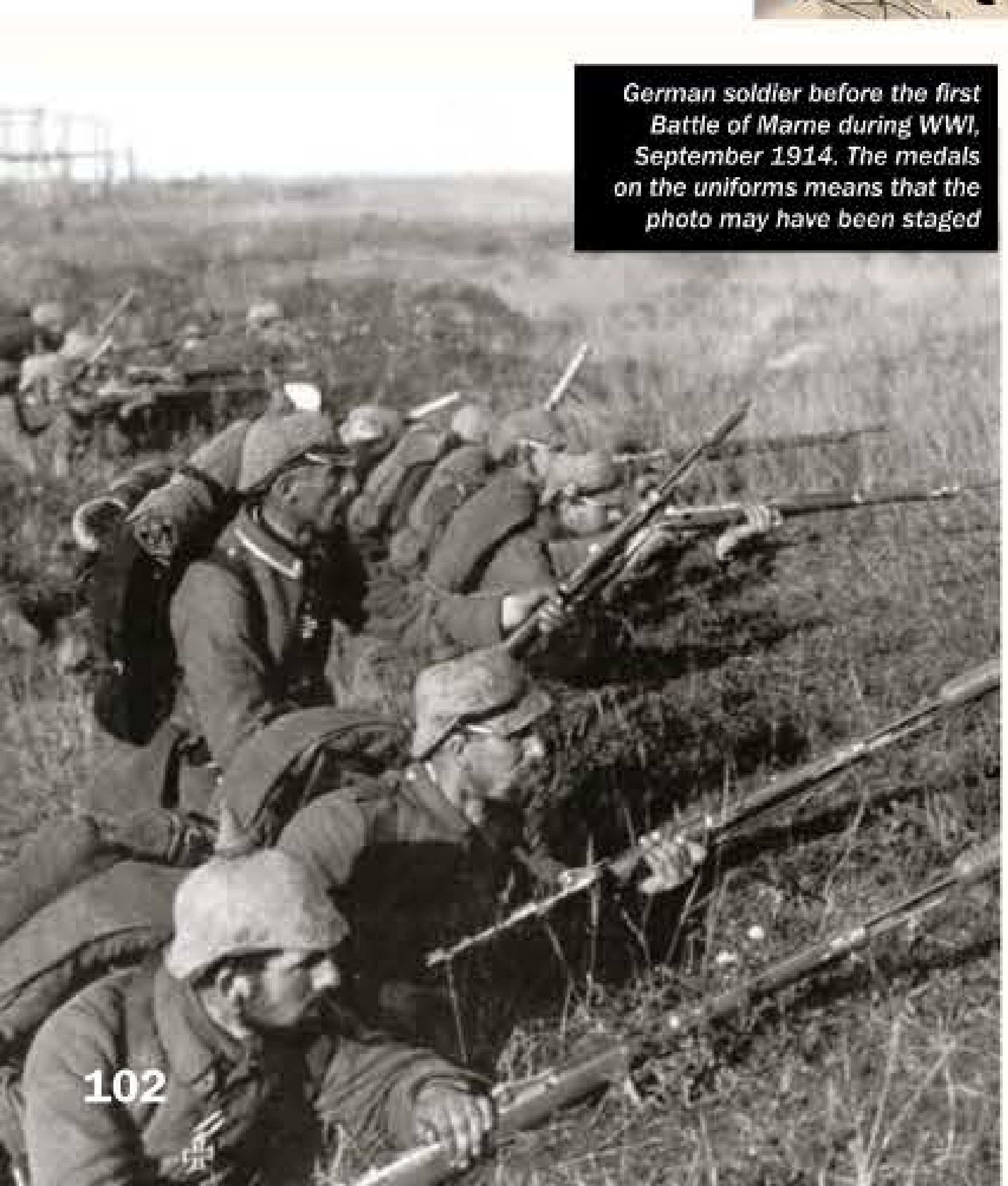
"NO WRITER OF FICTION WOULD DARE TO FASTEN SUCH AN ACHIEVEMENT TO ANY OF HIS CHARACTERS, BUT THE IRISH HAVE ALWAYS HAD THE REPUTATION OF BEING EXCELLENT FIGHTERS AND LANCE CORPORAL MICHAEL O'LEARY IS CLEARLY ONE OF THEM"

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

"O'LEARY CAME BACK FROM HIS KILLING AS COOL AS IF HE HAD BEEN FOR A WALK IN THE PARK, ACCOMPANIED BY THE TWO PRISONERS HE HAD TAKEN. HE PROBABLY SAVED THE LIVES OF THE WHOLE COMPANY"

SERGEANT LOWRY





German soldier before the first Battle of Marne during WWI, September 1914. The medals on the uniforms means that the photo may have been staged



04 OUT OF AMMO

Instead of re-joining the charge, O'Leary made a beeline for the second German machine gun. The ground in front of it was too marshy and boggy for a direct approach, so he climbed the railway embankment before, for the second time in as many minutes, charging directly at a lethal killing machine discharging hundreds of rounds a minute. Displaying remarkable luck and calm, he fired three shots that put down three Germans. The other two enemy soldiers had no stomach left to fight and raised their hands in surrender, not knowing the Irishman had run out of bullets. His gun held ten bullets and all of them had been expended, eight directly into German flesh.



WHAT O'LEARY DID NEXT

After returning to England to help encourage others to sign up, O'Leary returned to action and served the rest of the war, much of it in the Balkans Campaign. Following Germany's surrender, he returned to Canada where he worked in the police force for several years. He returned to Britain and, remarkably for a man aged over 50, served in WWII as a captain in the Middlesex regiment. Poor health forced him to return from the front line but he still assisted the war effort.

VICTORIA CROSS

The Victoria Cross (VC) is the highest military honour that can be awarded to citizens in the Commonwealth and previously in the British Empire. It is given for valour in the face of the enemy and can be awarded to anyone who is serving under military command. It was introduced to honour acts of bravery committed during the Crimean War (1853-1856). Previously there was no standardised system for recognising gallantry regardless of length of service or rank. The inscription on the award is 'for valour', after Queen Victoria turned down the initial suggestion of 'For the brave', saying that all of her soldiers were brave. The VC has been awarded 1,355 times, but only 14 times since the end of World War II.

GEORG MEISER

This NCO in the 119th Reserve Infantry Regiment became famous for his bravery in dozens of daring trench raids and patrols in No Man's Land

WORDS **ROB SCHÄFER**

The 119th Reserve Infantry Regiment from Württemberg was mobilised just after the outbreak of war, on 2 August 1914, after which it took part in the invasion of France before moving to the Somme in September 1914. After some brisk actions against the French Army at Orvillers and La Boisselle, the regiment finally settled in the area of Beaumont in May 1915; a position it would continue to hold throughout the Battle of the Somme.

Life at this sector of the front had been relatively quiet, a situation that changed when the British took over from the French in the summer of 1915. Nevertheless, the Germans never ceased trying to dominate No Man's Land with all means available. Nearly every night, small specialist units of men went out into the wasteland between the lines to gather intelligence, bring in prisoners and to cause as much carnage as they possibly could. By evaluating and applying the lessons learned during these raids, the units of XIV Reserve Corps, the 119th Reserve Infantry Regiment among them, soon became highly proficient in conducting these kind of operations in which the German regiments generally kept the upper end over their British adversaries.

A raid, launched by 75 men of II Battalion RIR119 on the night of 6 April 1916 in the Beaumont-Hamel area near Y-Ravine, caused the British 112 casualties. The German raiders would lose three men and have one seriously wounded. The men who conducted these daring raids and patrols were always volunteers and usually there was no shortage of them. A successful patrol in which enemy soldiers were killed or taken prisoner and which managed to obtain important intelligence was guaranteed to be rewarded with a medal or even a promotion. Patrols and raids were seen as a means to keep the men keen, active and motivated, and many regiments awarded decorative commendation certificates for successful patrols and raids to encourage volunteers.

Many German soldiers specialised themselves in the art of raiding and patrolling as the dangerous forays into No Man's Land were a means to gather fame, promotions and awards quickly. Many achieved legendary status within their regiments and even in the entire army. They were often spared from regular duty and, contrary to our 21st century view of the soldier of World War I, often enjoyed the excitement and adrenalin rush of battle.

One of these men was Georg Meiser from Gründelhardt in Württemberg, who served with the 119th Reserve Infantry Regiment. Meiser had been with the regiment from the start and by mid-1915, was a seasoned veteran with a reputation for reckless bravery. Having been decorated with the Iron Cross in autumn 1914, he received the much rarer 1st Class of the coveted cross in summer 1915.

On 14 September, Unteroffizier Meiser, then still a Gefreiter, has already been decorated with the Iron Cross 2nd Class for capturing an enemy ammunition waggon near Rougiville. With his daring courage and devotion, Meiser has made a name for himself. Wherever there was a call for volunteers, Meiser always stood in front. Since then, he has harassed the enemy on countless, reckless patrols. Leading a sentry patrol at the road Serre-Mailly on 6 June 1915, he has brought in two French prisoners and captured an enemy machine gun and a stash of enemy trench maps. For this deed, I recommend Unteroffizier Meiser to be decorated with the Iron Cross 1st Class.
Oblt R Anton Mühlbayer, 9./RIR119, 15 June 1915

In October that year, Meiser went out into No Man's Land again. It was to be his final patrol.

On 22 October 1915, I volunteered to join an armed patrol under command of Unteroffizier Meiser. In addition, Ersatz-Reservist Reinhold Hähnle, Ersatz-Reservist Phillip Knies and Reservist Wilhelm Vitzer participated in the operation. Our task was to secure No Man's Land against forays of enemy patrols.
At 7pm, our patrol left the trenches in section C3. In the vicinity of Hawthorn Ridge, we spotted an enemy patrol, five men strong, in a distance of about 20 metres. It was unclear where they were heading to, but Uffz Meiser made it clear that he wanted to catch the enemy from the rear. Shortly before we had reached the right position we were suddenly taken under short-range fire from some nearby shell craters. Shortly afterwards, English infantry – about 40-60 men strong – charged us from the left and right. The way towards our own lines had been cut off. Without hesitation, Uffz Meiser gave the order to charge the foe to our left and to fight our way through. While charging, we covered the enemy with a volley of hand grenades. The effect did not fail to materialise and a number Englishmen went down.
Due to our position, the English behind us had to hold their fire as otherwise they would have risked



"WILLING TO SACRIFICE THEMSELVES, THE NIGHTLY HUNTERS PROWLED THEIR DANGEROUS HUNTING GROUNDS – WHERE DEATH LURKED"

"The narrow piece of earth which stretched between the barbed wire entanglements and which during the day was deserted and lifeless, became alive during the nights when dark silhouettes crawled, listening from their trenches, to hunt their human prey... Bad weather, storm, and rain would not stop them, neither could the light of the moon or the freezing cold. Willing to sacrifice themselves, the nightly hunters prowled their dangerous hunting grounds – where death lurked."
Regimental History of the 119th Reserve Infantry Regiment

Vizefeldwebel Georg Meiser in March 1916, proudly displaying his bravery awards

"I ENGAGED IN CLOSE COMBAT WITH THE ENGLISH. ONE RAMMED HIS BAYONET INTO MY LEFT THIGH, BUT BEFORE HE COULD LUNGE AGAIN ERSATZ-RESERVIST HÄHNLE HAD STRUCK HIM DOWN WITH A BLOW OF HIS SPADE"



A German trench-raiding patrol navigates their own barbed wire defences on the Western Front, c.1916

hitting their own men in front of us. Meiser charged ahead and struck an English officer down with his rifle butt. Dropping the rifle, he then drew his pistol and fired a number of shots on two other Englishmen. One was mortally hit while the other fell backwards into a shell crater.

Shortly after that, I engaged in close combat with the English. One rammed his bayonet into my left thigh, but before he could lunge again Ersatz-Reservist Hähnle had struck him down with a blow of his spade. All of this did not last longer than four or five minutes. In this moment, I noticed that Uffz Meiser was bleeding profusely from a wound to his chest. Now that we had broken through the English ranks, we retreated, fighting towards our own lines, continuously firing at the Englishmen that were chasing us.

By now we could hear the sound of whistles from the direction of our own lines, a clear sign that our unfortunate situation had been understood. Now it was imperative to hold out as long as possible. In the meantime, Uffz Meiser had picked up an English rifle and, even though he was severely wounded, directed well-aimed fire at the advancing enemy. Ersatz-Reservist Hähnle was shot in the stomach and had to be dragged back by Reservist Vitzer and myself. Shortly afterwards, the comrades in our position opened fire on the English and finally the enemy began to retreat. We had battled against a force ten times superior to our own and had managed to wound and kill at least a dozen Englishmen. Ersatz-Reservist Hähnle succumbed to his severe wound shortly afterwards. Uffz Meiser and I were transported to Feldlazarett 9 at Beaumont.

Witness statement of Kriegsfreiwilliger Hermann Baun, 9./RIR119

For his repeated courage under fire, Georg Meiser was recommended to be decorated with the Golden Medal of Military Merit, the Kingdom of Württemberg's highest bravery award for enlisted men and NCOs.

On 22 October 1915, Unteroffizier Meiser (9./ RIR119) led an armed patrol in strength of five men into No Man's Land on the Hawthorn Ridge near Beaumont. At 8.30pm, Meiser's group was ambushed and cut off by a numerically far superior enemy force (40-60 men). Neglecting this superiority, Meiser threw his small group against the foe to force a breakthrough towards the German lines.

Even though Meiser and two of his men (Reservist Hähnle and Kriegsfreiwilliger Baun) had been severely wounded, he managed to lead his men back to our own lines while dragging the unconscious Hähnle with them. During the fighting retreat, they inflicted at least 12-15 bloody casualties on the enemy.

Since the start of the war, Meiser has proven himself in countless, daring operations and as an NCO he is extraordinarily popular with the men of his company. Since December 1914, he has voluntarily participated in more than 50 patrols and was decorated with the Iron Cross 1st Class on 3 August 1915. For this reason, I recommend to award Meiser with a promotion to Vizefeldwebel and to decorate him the Golden Medal of Military Merit.

Major Schäfer, III Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment Nr 119, 7 November 1915

The award was confirmed and Meiser finally received it from the hands of his king in March 1916. By then, he had already transformed into a reluctant and bitter hero. The chest wound he had received during action had made him unfit to continue his service in the front lines. Being fit to do garrison duty only, he had been transferred back to the replacement battalion in Württemberg where he tasked to train recruits for the regiment. For a trench fighter like Meiser, always striving for promotion, this came as a severe blow.

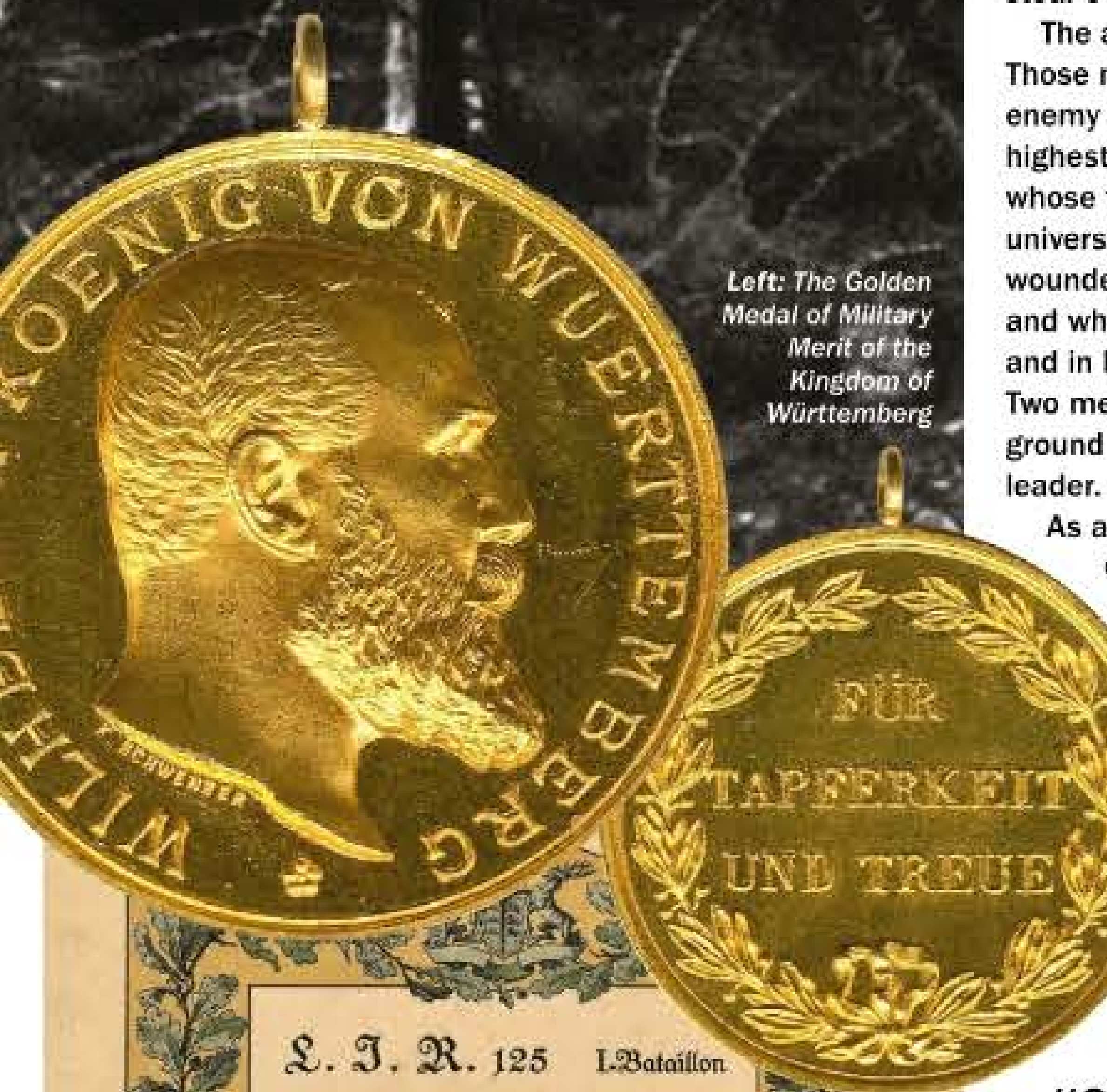
In regards to my final rank of überzähliger (surplus) Vizefeldwebel, I have to add that I was put in for promotion to Vizefeldwebel a number of times, by both by my battalion commander in the field and by my Hauptmann, but according to the commander of the 119th replacement battalion, I could not be promoted as I was fit for garrison duty only. Why was I only fit to do garrison duty? Because I was stupid enough to lead my five men against 20 Englishmen (this is according to the regimental history, in reality there were more than 40), which we had already taunted a number of times before by mounting bells to the enemy wire, slipping past their patrols to plaster their trenches with grenades, entering their trenches to steal their newspapers and one day we even managed to steal 6 English horses.

The articles of war are nothing but a travesty. Those men displaying bravery in the face of the enemy are supposed to be able to climb to the highest ranks in the army? Yes – maybe those whose fathers's wallets allow them to study at university. Proof? The other night, after I was wounded, one of those gentlemen took the lead and when the English arrived, he took to his heels and in his panic, he took 16 men back with him. Two men of my patrol remained, they stood their ground and they managed to shoot the English leader.

As a reward, they were made into surplus Gefreite – the chap to run away with 16 of his men was promoted to Leutnant six weeks later. Personally, I never volunteered for anything anymore, as did many others. Such treatment sparked revolutionary thoughts in even the bravest of comrades. No reward up until today. Only hate and envy as in the old days.

Georg Meiser in a letter to the war archives in Württemberg, 30 January 1937





Left: The Golden Medal of Military Merit of the Kingdom of Württemberg



L. J. R. 125 I. Bataillon

Der Unteroffizier Karl Becker

Zur ehrenvollen Erinnerung wird dem Obgenannten dieses Blatt verliehen.

"SUCH TREATMENT SPARKED REVOLUTIONARY THOUGHTS IN EVEN THE BRAVEST OF COMRADES. NO REWARD UP UNTIL TODAY. ONLY HATE AND ENVY AS IN THE OLD DAYS"

Left: Commendation certificate for leading a highly successful patrol against the enemy, Unteroffizier Karl Becker of the 125th Landwehr-Infantry-Regiment



Above and below: An exhausted soldier of the 16th Storm Batallion after returning from a patrol in 1917. His uniform is torn by barbed wire



Images: Alamy

FRANCIS HARVEY

The Battle of Jutland was perhaps the greatest naval battle in history. During the 36-hour clash, around 100,000 sailors in 250 ships fought for control of the North Sea. 25 ships were sunk and over 8,500 sailors lost their lives, including one man who sacrificed himself to save his crew

WORDS ALICE ROBERTS-PRATT

At just after 4pm on 31 May 1916, HMS Lion was hit with a lethal barrage of German shells. The colossal naval battle off the coast of Jutland had been raging for only just over an hour, with German and British ships pounding one another with devastating firepower that would eventually obliterate some 25 vessels. Crippled, HMS Lion and its 1,000 crew were now seemingly doomed to meet a similar end, as fire threatened to ignite one of its turret's ammunition stores. The quick actions of one Marine, however, would change everything.

Francis Harvey was born on 29 April 1873 in Upper Sydenham, Kent. He was descended from a military family, being the son of Commander John William Francis Harvey and the grandson of Captain John Harvey of the 9th Regiment of Foot, great-grandson of Admiral Sir Edward Harvey and great-great-grandson of John Harvey, who was killed on the Glorious First of June in 1794.

In 1884, Harvey and his family moved to Southsea, Hampshire, where he attended Portsmouth Grammar School. He flourished and achieved excellent academic results. When he left school he decided to follow in the footsteps of his family, and elected to attend the Royal Naval College Greenwich as a Royal Marines Officer cadet, turning down a place at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst.

Graduating in 1892, he was made a full lieutenant, the following year joining HMS Wildfire as his first commission at sea. He was at sea for just one year before he was back on shore again attending gunnery courses at HMS Excellent and qualifying in 1896 as an instructor first class in naval gunnery.

THE INSTRUCTOR OF GUNNERY

In 1898, Harvey was serving aboard the newly commissioned cruiser HMS Phaeton, to which he was appointed the previous year. The same year, he returned home and assumed the role of Assistant Instructor for Gunnery at Plymouth Division, serving aboard HMS Edgar and HMS Diadem, attached to the Channel Fleet. It was during this time that the young Harvey would practice his gunnery skills.

On 28 January 1900, Harvey was promoted to captain and embarked on a string of postings to HMS Royal Sovereign, HMS Duke of Edinburgh, HMS St George and the new battle cruiser, HMS Inflexible. Throughout, he taught gunnery to the heavy units of the Channel Fleet and became Instructor of Gunnery at Chatham Dockyard in 1910. He was subsequently promoted to major, with one report on the gunnery school claiming:

"[The] degree of efficiency in [the] Gunnery Establishment at Chatham is very high both as regards general training and attention to detail. Great credit is due [to] all concerned particularly to Major FJW Harvey, the I of G."

This report with its high praise earned Harvey a promotion to senior marine officer on HMS Lion, the flagship of the British battle cruiser fleet. This was to be Harvey's last and most significant posting.


HMS Lion, Princess and Queen Mary at the Battle of Jutland



"I SAW A LARGE PLATE, WHICH I JUDGED TO BE THE TOP OF A TURRET, BLOWN INTO THE AIR... MY ATTENTION WAS DRAWN FROM THIS BY A SHEET OF FLAME BY HER SECOND FUNNEL, WHICH SHOT UP ABOUT 600 FEET"

Commander Alan Mackenzie-Grieve, HMS Birmingham, observing the hit on HMS Lion

Portrait thought to be of Major Francis Harvey

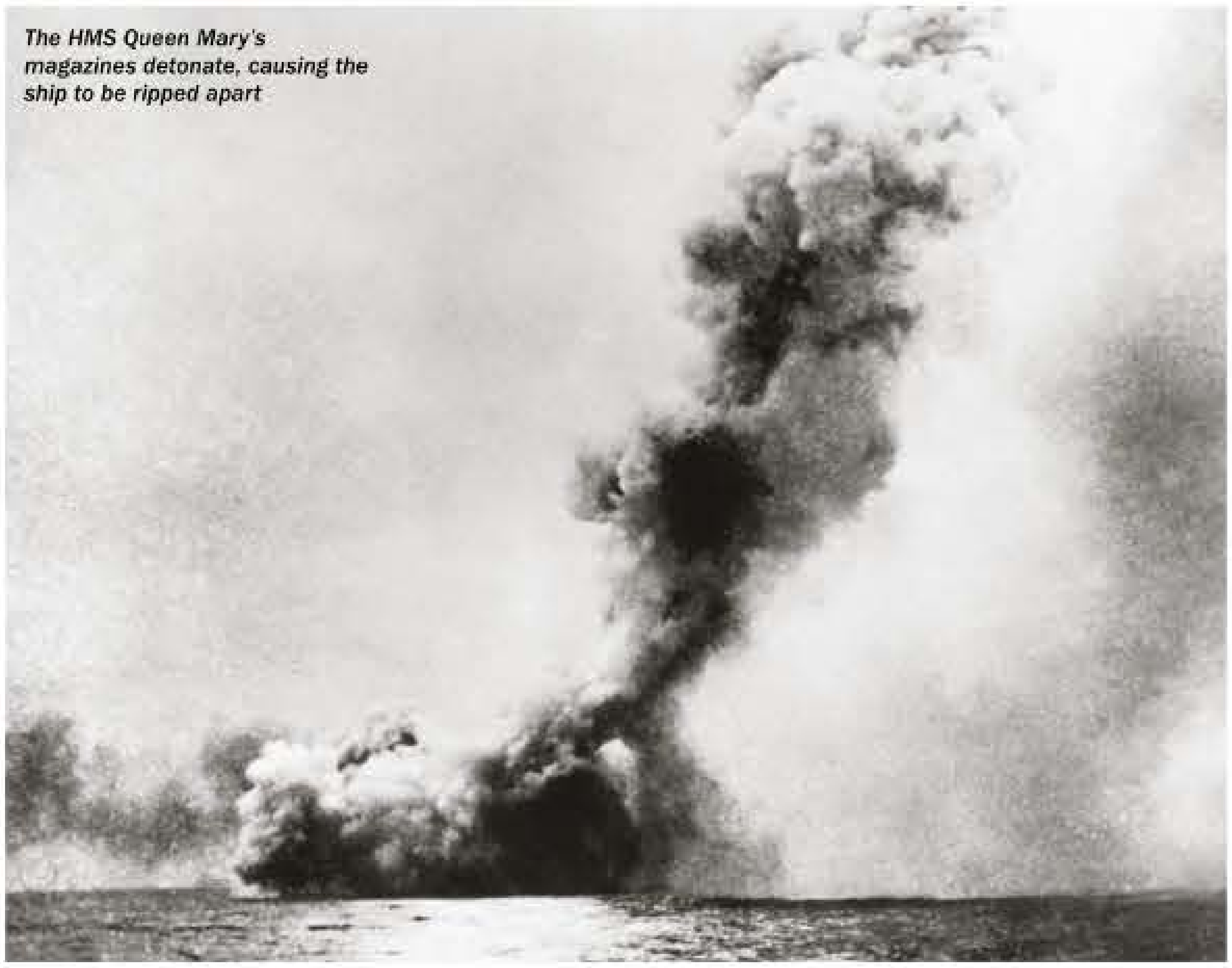
JOINING HMS LION

Lion, under the command of Admiral David Beatty, was armed with eight 13.5 inch guns, and Harvey's office was positioned under 'Q' turret where he directed the guns' operation and fire. As well as his duties here, however, he continued to serve as the senior marine officer on board right through his first military campaign, World War I.

It was not long before Harvey saw action. At the Battle of Heligoland Bight on 28 August 1914, HMS Lion, HMS Queen Mary and HMS Princess Royal sped into the Heligoland Bight, joining the British and German forces already engaged in an embittered fight. Luckily, due to the poor weather, Beatty's battle cruisers were able to surprise and destroy SMS Cölin and SMS Ariadne, with Harvey's guns scoring many of the hits.

On 24 January 1915, Harvey once again saw action when he faced Rear Admiral Franz von Hipper and his German battle cruiser squadron who had crossed the North Sea and repeatedly bombarded British coastal towns including Scarborough, Hartlepool and Whitby. The British and German squadrons came to blows at the Battle of Dogger Bank.

During the fight one of HMS Lion's shots hit one of SMS Seydlitz's turrets. A huge explosion ensued, destroying the adjacent turret and killing 160 men. The German flagship only survived due to the actions of sailor Wilhelm Heidkamp, who flooded the magazines. This action would later be mirrored by Harvey on the HMS Lion. After the battle, he continued to serve aboard HMS Lion at Rosyth into May 1916, resuming his gunnery training and preparing for major fleet action.



The HMS Queen Mary's magazines detonate, causing the ship to be ripped apart

'DER TAG' ARRIVES

In the event of war, Britain had long-standing plans to blockade Germany economically, cutting off vital imports from the Americas. A 'distant blockade' was planned, keeping the Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands. This gave Germany access to the North Sea, but Britain could still capture or sink her merchant ships.

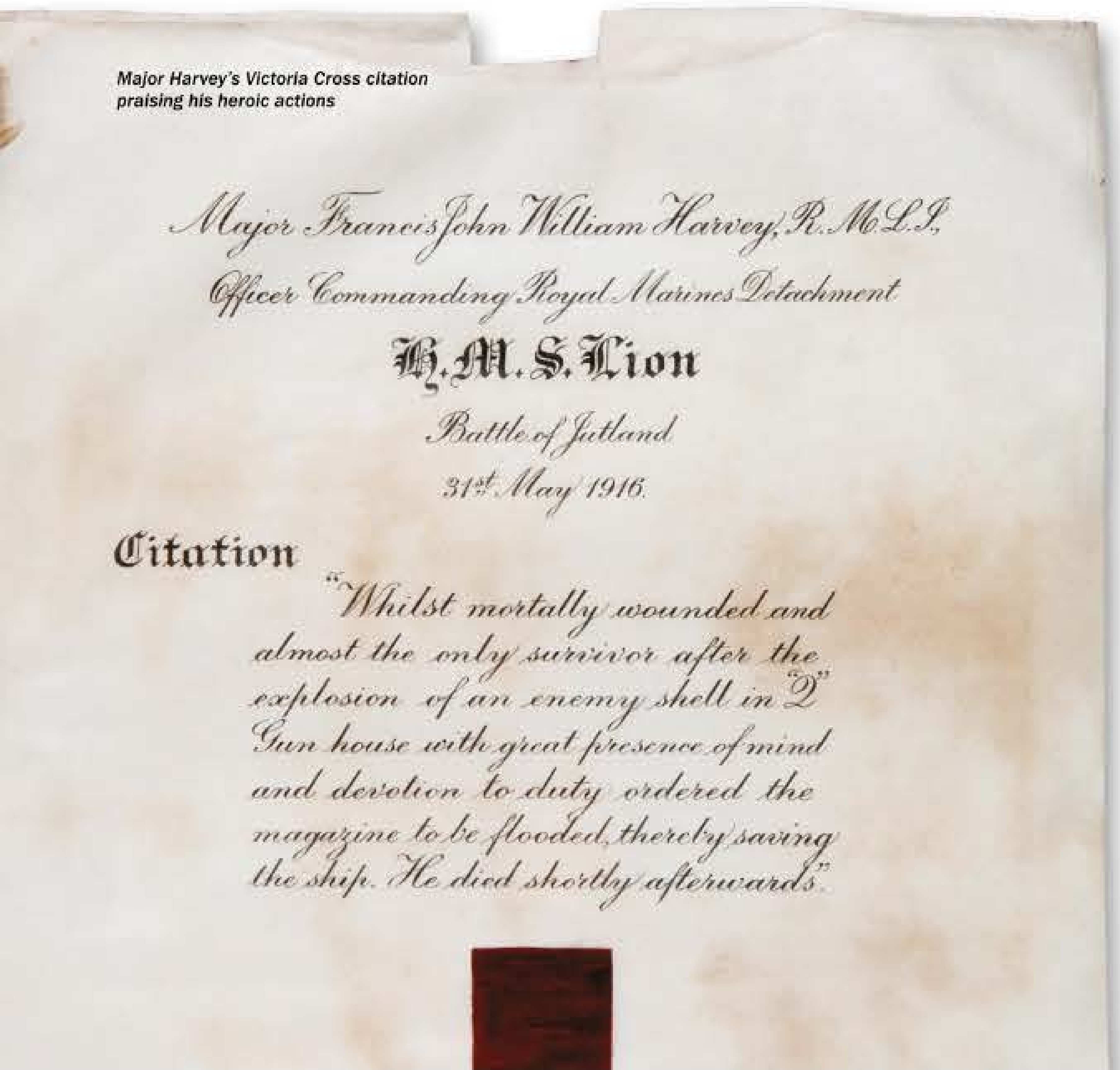
In January 1916, Vice Admiral Reinhard Scheer took command of the German High Seas Fleet and swiftly devised a plan to provoke the British into making a mistake.

Hipper's battle cruisers were to attack British convoys of merchant ships en route to neutral Norway. Scheer expected Beatty to engage Hipper with his Battle Cruiser Fleet from Rosyth, to be joined later by Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Sir John Jellicoe from Scapa Flow. German submarines would ambush the emerging fleets, and Hipper would engage Beatty and lure him towards the main High Seas Fleet. Destroying Beatty's force first would give the Germans equality in numbers. Only after this would the German fleet steam from its base at Wilhelmshaven and break the British blockade in a great confrontation that the German navy called 'Der Tag' (The Day).

A civilian code-breaking team known as 'Room 40' got wind of the German raid and the Grand Fleet put to sea. Unfortunately, the report was later amended to indicate that the Germans were still in harbour, so although Jellicoe and Beatty were already at sea on 30 May 1916, before Scheer left Germany, neither expected a battle. Scheer and Hipper were unclear if the British were at sea, but the whole plan was supposed to bring about a battle.

First contact was at 2.28pm when HMS Galatea, a British scouting cruiser in Beatty's force, spotted some of Hipper's ships. The battle had begun. Beatty's six battle cruisers had been strengthened with the 5th Battle Squadron's four fast, powerful 'superdreadnought' battleships, but they were five miles away and did not see Beatty's signals to join him. Hipper turned away, drawing Beatty south towards the High Seas Fleet.

Major Harvey's Victoria Cross citation praising his heroic actions



Major Francis John William Harvey, R.M.L.I.,
Officer Commanding Royal Marines Detachment
H.M.S. Lion
Battle of Jutland
31st May 1916.

Citation

"Whilst mortally wounded and almost the only survivor after the explosion of an enemy shell in "Q" Gun house with great presence of mind and devotion to duty ordered the magazine to be flooded, thereby saving the ship. He died shortly afterwards."



"THERE WAS A TERRIFIC EXPLOSION FORWARD… I COULD SEE NOTHING FOR ABOUT A MINUTE AND THEN ALL CLEARED AWAY AS THE FOREMOST PART OF THE SHIP WENT UNDER WATER"

Midshipman Peregrine Dearden, HMS Queen Mary

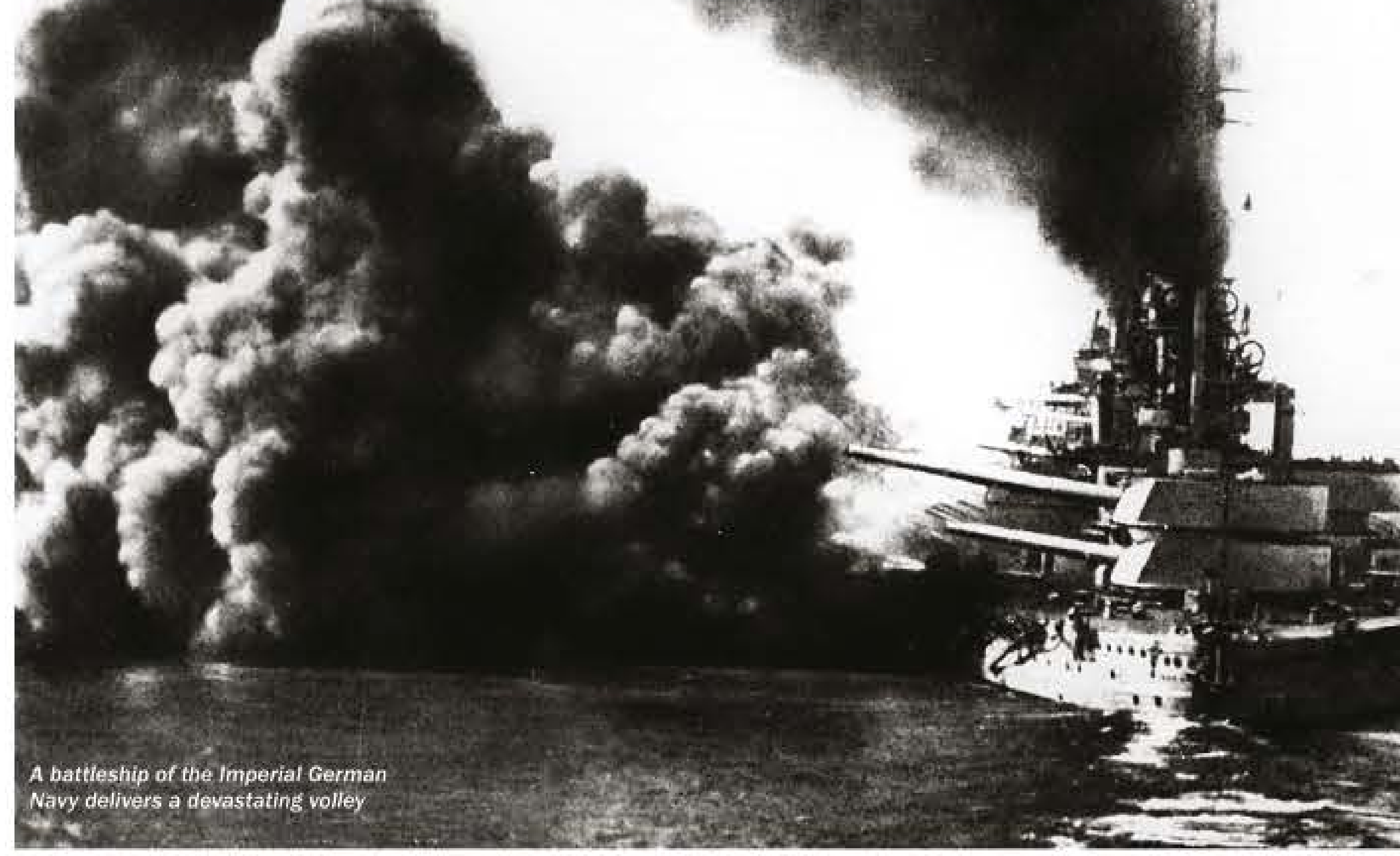
An artist's depiction of the Battle of Jutland captures the chaos and intense fighting that occurred

HMS LION (BATTLE CRUISER)

LAUNCHED: 6 AUGUST 1910
DISPLACEMENT: 26,690 TONS (DESIGN LOAD)
LENGTH: 700FT (213.4M)
SPEED: 52KM/H (32MPH; 28 KNOTS)
COMPLEMENT: 1,092 MEN
ARMAMENT: 4 X 2 – BL 13.5IN MK V GUNS; 16 X 1 – BL 4IN MK VII GUNS; 2 X 1 – 21IN MK II SUBMERGED TORPEDO TUBES
ARMOUR, BARBETTES: 229-203MM (9–8IN), BELT: 229-102MM (9–4IN)
BULKHEADS: 102MM (4IN); CONNING TOWER: 254MM (10IN); DECK: 64MM (2.5IN); TURRETS: 229MM (9IN)

"IN THE LONG GLORIOUS HISTORY OF THE ROYAL MARINES THERE IS NO NAME OR DEED WHICH, IN ITS CHARACTER OR CONSEQUENCES RANKS ABOVE THIS"

Winston Churchill



A battleship of the Imperial German Navy delivers a devastating volley

Hipper had time to prepare and was ready for Beatty. By 3.48pm the Germans were within range and fired first, with the shells ruthlessly hammering the British ships. At 4pm SMS Lützow bombarded HMS Lion with nine shells, one of which hit the right top corner of the left hand gun port at the junction of the faceplate and the roof. This pierced a section of the 9-inch faceplate and penetrated Lion's 'Q' turret, detonating and causing a lethal fire that could not be extinguished.

All those who were stationed in the gun house were either killed or wounded by the first explosion. Harvey, who was suffering from severe burns and injuries, noticed that the shell hoist that led to the ship's main forward magazine had been jammed open. With the explosive shells left exposed like this, the flash fire would race down towards the magazine, resulting in a cataclysmic explosion that would destroy the ship, killing everyone on board.

Harvey, mortally wounded and suffering from shock, dragged himself through the carnage and debris of Q turret over to the voice pipe and gave the order for the magazine doors to be closed and the compartments to be flooded. This action would stop the cordite in the magazines from detonating.

Harvey turned to the one man still standing, his sergeant, and commanded him to go to the bridge and deliver a full report to the captain of the ship, Ernle Chatfield, a standard practice in damage exercises. Shortly afterwards Francis Harvey collapsed and died of his wounds – he was just 43.

The sergeant immediately followed his instructions and went to the bridge to inform the captain of Harvey's actions. The captain quickly ordered the closure of Q magazine doors and the flooding of the compartments. This order passed through the Transmitting Station underneath the armoured deck where Stoker 1st Class William Yeo carried out the instructions within minutes of the hit. HMS Lion, and its roughly 1,000-strong crew, were saved.

Unfortunately, many of the other ships were not so lucky. HMS Indefatigable suffered a succession of magazine explosions, tearing the ship apart and losing 1,013 men. HMS Queen Mary detonated in a great plume of smoke taking with her 1,275 lives.

At 6.30pm, a shell penetrated the midships turret of Rear Admiral Horace Hood's flagship HMS Invincible, the original battle cruiser, almost out-of-date by 1916. Again the flash raced down into the magazines and the midships section vanished in a huge explosion, killing Hood and over a thousand men.

"TO HIM WE OWED OUR LIVES"

In the latter part of the battle, the scorched body of Major Francis Harvey was removed from the ruins of Q turret. He and 98 of his fellow crewmembers were buried at sea with full honours. The bravery and courage that Harvey showed in the face of certain death was not ignored. In Admiral Jellicoe's post-battle dispatch Harvey was mentioned by name. More importantly, Harvey became the first Marine to be posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest award for courage 'in the face of the enemy', which was presented by King George V to his widow Ethel at Buckingham Palace on 15 September 1916.

The medal group was loaned to the Royal Marines Museum, Eastney in 1973 by his son Lieutenant-Colonel John Malcolm Harvey of the King's Regiment. Harvey's name adorns the Chatham Naval Memorial to those with no known grave, governed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

25 ships were sunk and dozens damaged at the Battle of Jutland. Both navies learned important lessons and redesigned their ships. Of those sailors who died, 6,094 were British and 2,551 German. Most went down with their ships or were buried at sea; only a few have marked graves. The British were mostly buried in the naval cemetery at Lyness in Orkney, or in scattered graves around the Scandinavian coast. The German dead mostly lie in the naval cemetery at Wilhelmshaven.

Over a thousand sailors on both sides returned home with injuries. Many more were psychologically damaged, in an era when conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder were poorly understood. A total of 177 British sailors became prisoners of war in a naval camp at Brandenburg-an-der-Havel, near Berlin.

The Imperial (later Commonwealth) War Graves Commission recorded the names of sailors with no known grave on Memorials to the Missing, in the ports of Chatham, Portsmouth and Plymouth. The German navy saw Jutland as the start of a tradition, naming a number of warships after Jutland heroes. After the war, the anniversary was commemorated in both countries.

Images: Alamy, Mary Evans, National Museum of the Royal Navy



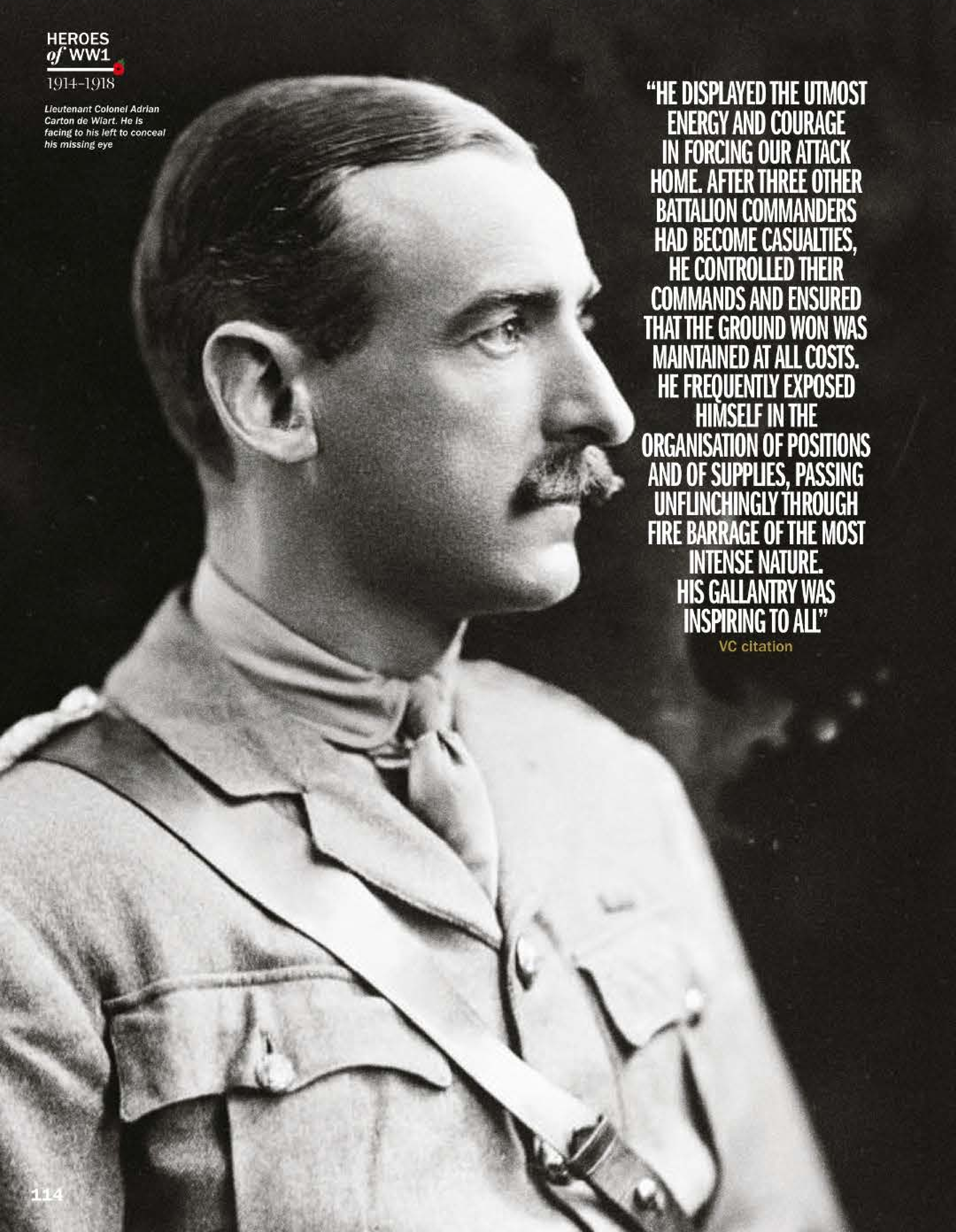
36 HOURS: JUTLAND 1916, THE BATTLE THAT WON THE WAR

To commemorate the centenary of the Battle of Jutland, The National Museum of the Royal Navy in partnership with Imperial War Museums are staging '36 Hours: Jutland 1916, The Battle That Won the War', the largest and most comprehensive exhibition ever on the subject, highlighting the essential role of the Royal Navy in winning World War I. Sitting alongside over 200 Jutland related artefacts are objects belonging to and associated with Francis Harvey and HMS Lion.

Objects include Harvey's Victoria Cross and Ceremonial Sword, a piece of armour plate from a bulkhead in 'Q' Turret which is inscribed in memory of Francis Harvey and the other men who lost their lives, a German shell splinter recovered from Lion and the medals awarded to Captain Francis Jones, RMLI who discovered the charred body of Francis Harvey.

It runs until December 2018. For more information, visit: www.nmrn.org.uk/36-hours





Lieutenant Colonel Adrian Carton de Wiart. He is facing to his left to conceal his missing eye

"HE DISPLAYED THE UTMOST ENERGY AND COURAGE IN FORCING OUR ATTACK HOME. AFTER THREE OTHER BATTALION COMMANDERS HAD BECOME CASUALTIES, HE CONTROLLED THEIR COMMANDS AND ENSURED THAT THE GROUND WON WAS MAINTAINED AT ALL COSTS. HE FREQUENTLY EXPOSED HIMSELF IN THE ORGANISATION OF POSITIONS AND OF SUPPLIES, PASSING UNFLINCHINGLY THROUGH FIRE BARRAGE OF THE MOST INTENSE NATURE. HIS GALLANTRY WAS INSPIRING TO ALL"

VC citation

ADRIAN CARTON DE WIART

Literally shot to pieces during his years of service in the British Army, the Belgian native Adrian Carton de Wiart earned Britain's highest honour for gallantry during the Somme Offensive

WORDS **FRANK JASTRZEMBSKI**

When speaking of Sir Garnet Wolseley, Dr. Joseph H Lehmann observed that the British general "believed the best possible way to get ahead in the army was to try to get killed every time he had a chance." Wolseley had plenty of scars, medals and honours to show for it. Another soldier in the British Army, Adrian Carton de Wiart, lived by Wolseley's maxim. The transplanted Belgian-British army officer possessed a strange combination of a fiery temper, sense of humour in the darkest times, humility and an obsession to "justify his existence" through reckless heroism. His hairs-breadth escapes on the battlefield were legendary, and he would earn the Victoria Cross during the defence of La Boisselle in July 1916.

Born in Brussels, Belgium in May 1880, Adrian Carton de Wiart was never meant to be a soldier. His father, Carton de Wiart, a successful lawyer, moved his family to Cairo after the death of his wife. There he became a legal advisor to Khedive Tewfik. In 1888 he married an English woman, who ensured her new husband's children grew up to revere everything British.

In 1897 the 17-year-old de Wiart was sent to the University of Oxford to study law. Although well-versed in the French, English and Arabic languages, he failed as a student. He would rather be out playing cricket than hitting the books and hated the boundaries a university presented to his adventurous spirit.

When war broke out in Africa between the British Empire and the Boers in 1899, de Wiart abandoned his studies, feigned British citizenship, lied about his age and enlisted as a volunteer with Paget's Horse under the last name of Carton. "At that moment I knew, once and for all, that war was in my blood," he professed later.

It was not long before the reckless Oxford dropout was wounded. He was shot in the stomach and groin by a Boer sharpshooter during a skirmish. Fearing he would be sent back to Oxford after his recovery, he pleaded with his father to allow him to remain in the British Army. With his son failing at his studies and with his mind locked on other ambitions, Carton de Wiart had no choice but to yield.

Rising to the rank of captain, de Wiart served in Somaliland in the run-up to Britain's entry into World War I. He was serving with 'C' Company of the Somaliland Camel Corps, who had been tasked with crushing a Dervish force under the command of the Islamic leader Mohammed Abdullah Hassan – recognised among the British ranks as the 'Mad Mullah'. During the assault on the six redoubts at Shimber Berris, de Wiart was wounded in his left eye and elbow, and he had a chunk of his ear torn off when a Dervish shot was fired at him from less than a yard away. Patched up by the surgeon, he returned to the fight. He received another wound to the same eye from a ricocheting bullet but remained in the field.

> **"FRANKLY, I HAD ENJOYED THE WAR; IT HAD GIVEN ME MANY BAD MOMENTS, LOTS OF GOOD ONES, PLENTY OF EXCITEMENT..."**
> Adrian Carton de Wiart

Captain de Wiart's badly damaged eye was subsequently removed after the action, though he resisted, fearful of what it could do to his military career. He received the Distinguished Service Order for his service at Shimber Berris. His only afterthought on facing death and losing his eye in Somaliland was, "It had all been exhilarating fun."

He saw the loss of his eye as an opportunity rather than an end to his career. He was sent back to England to recuperate, frothing at the idea of being closer to the fighting on the Western Front. He appeared before the Medical Board to receive permission to return to active service. The examiners relented and allowed him to return to the field under the condition that he wore a glass eye. Following the board's approval, de Wiart tossed the annoying glass ball out of the window of a taxi, donning a black patch instead for the remainder of his life.

Back in action, this time on the Western Front, he was wounded in the left hand in an artillery strike during the Second Battle of Ypres. This German shell fragment left his hand, in De Wiart's own words, a "gory mess". His left

palm was gone and most of his wrist was shot away. Two of his fingers hung only by a thread of skin. The surgeon refused to remove his two remaining fingers, so de Wiart handled it himself, tearing them off. Sent back to England to recover, what remained of the heap of flesh that used to be his hand was amputated.

Yet again convincing the Medical Board examiners to allow him to return to the front (he argued he was still able to shoot and fish), de Wiart transferred from the cavalry to an infantry battalion. Now a lieutenant colonel, he took command of the 8th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment. The unit was badly in need of field officers, prompting de Wiart to seek service in the infantry, where he would have a greater chance for distinction. He returned to the front just in time to play a vital role in the Somme Offensive in July 1916.

The French village of La Boisselle was an imposing obstacle for General William Pulteney's III Corps. The Germans turned each wrecked home and building in the village into a mini citadel, with all approaches covered by machine gun crews – some of the best-trained soldiers in the German army. Two mines were detonated under the German lines by engineers in the hope they would throw the German defenders into a state of confusion.

During the first two days of fighting between Fricourt and La Boisselle the 21st Division made progress and forced the Germans back. But on the division's left, the 34th and 8th Divisions of the III Corps made little headway at La Boisselle against the German 28th Reserve and 26th Reserve Divisions.

On 2 July fresh reinforcements from the 19th Division, originally held in reserve, led to the British securing a foothold within La Boisselle. Lieutenant Colonel de Wiart's battalion, alongside the 10th Warwicks, were called up to support the battered Eighth North Staffords and 10th Worcesters. De Wiart described the disarray in the village: "La Boisselle was a truly bloody scene. The casualties had been appalling: there were dead everywhere, not a house standing and the ground as flattened as if the very soul had been blasted out of the earth and turned into a void." Together, these combined British units wrestled, metre-by-metre, trenches from the Germans. By 6pm de Wiart was placed in command of all the units in La Boisselle – the other three senior battalion commanders were either dead or wounded.

"HE IS A MODEL OF CHIVALRY AND HONOUR"

Winston Churchill

A good portion of the village was in the hands of the British by next morning. De Wiart received orders from his division commander, General Tom Bridges – a daring character himself – to hold on to La Boisselle at all costs. The Germans counterattacked the same day at 8.30am. The author Everard Wyrall, in his history *The 19th Division*, declared that



Soldiers of the 10th Worcesters bringing in German prisoners captured during the fight for La Boisselle



Above: British soldiers in a trench near La Boisselle. Captain de Wiart wrote, "La Boisselle was a truly bloody scene"



this German counterattack "led to what was probably the most intense fighting the Division had up to that period experienced." The battalions were forced halfway back through the village by 12.30pm. It looked as if the British would be driven from the ground they had fought so hard to capture.

Lieutenant Colonel de Wiart's men dug in around some hedges and fought to defend every inch of ground. Armed with only his walking stick, de Wiart inspired his men with his trademark calm under fire. Disregarding German artillery shells and bullets (miraculously dodging sniper bullets), he filled his men with admiration. With his only good arm, de Wiart yanked the pins from his Mills grenades out with his teeth, lobbing them at groups of onrushing German soldiers. It is hard to imagine what these German soldiers expressed to one another when they witnessed this crippled warrior with a pinned-up sleeve and a black eyepatch hurling grenades in their direction. His heroism and inspirational leadership motivated his men to hold their lines and allowed the British to secure La Boisselle by 5 July.

Around 3,500 men from the 19th Division fell in the fighting at La Boisselle. Adrian Carton de Wiart was one of three members of the division to be awarded the Victoria Cross. His citation, printed in the *London Gazette* on 9 September 1916, gave an admirable evaluation of his deeds.

Adrian Carton de Wiart was wounded a total of eight times before the close of the war and rose to the rank of brigadier general. He was invested by King George V with the Victoria Cross on 29 November 1916. He had met the king once before: while visiting British soldiers on the front line, King George ran into the eccentric officer. Striking up a conversation with the king, the Belgian thought it was an appropriate time to crack a joke. He commented on the irony that he had served in the British Army for ten years without being a British subject. King George, not pleased at all with de Wiart's remark, asked that he see to it that he rectify the issue of his citizenship.

Adrian Carton de Wiart continued in the service of the British Army for another 29 years. During the interwar years he served as a military attaché in Poland, narrowly escaping a Cossack ambush during the Soviet invasion of 1920. During World War II he commanded the Central Norwegian Expeditionary Force in 1940 and headed the British Military Mission in Yugoslavia in 1941. He was captured by the Italians after being shot down over the Mediterranean, escaped through a tunnel during his imprisonment but was recaptured. After his release, he served as Winston Churchill's representative to Nationalist China in October 1943.

The 'unkillable soldier' died in Ireland in June 1963. General de Wiart never viewed his life as adventurous but rather full of "misadventures". He declared in his autobiography years later, "That I should have survived them is to me by far the most interesting thing about it." He seemed to be one of those rare individuals who had a knack for eluding death but who also enjoyed facing it.

"IT MAY BE FOUND THAT MAJOR GENERAL DE WIART ONCE MORE OUT-HOLLYWOODED HOLLYWOOD"

Army News, 16 September 1943

Images: Alamy, Getty

TOM EDWIN ADLAM

During the Somme campaign, a schoolteacher from Salisbury inspired his men to victory against insurmountable odds

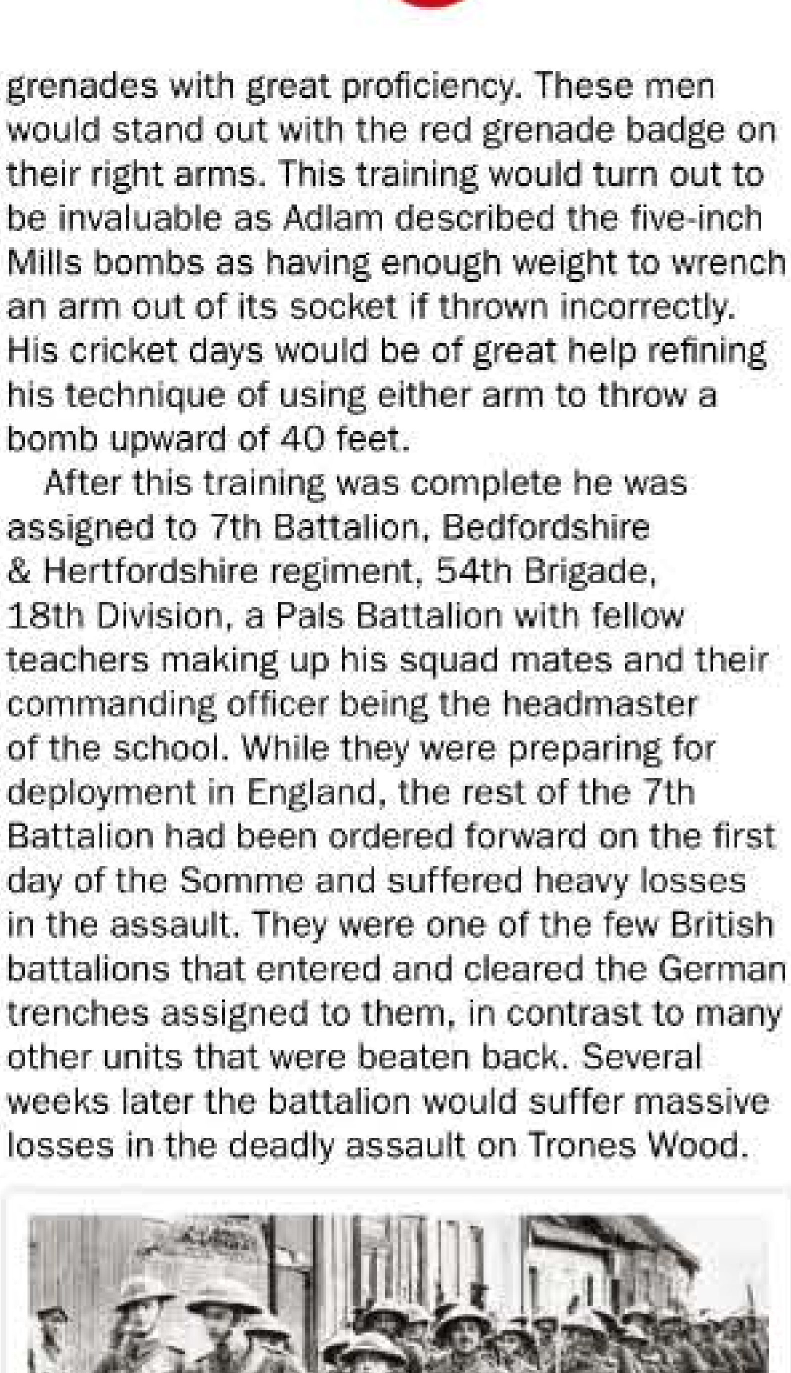
WORDS PETER WOLFGANG PRICE

By the 27 September 1916, the Somme campaign had been raging for almost two months and British soldiers in France were preparing themselves for an attack on the village of Thiepval and its formidable fortifications. Lieutenant-Colonel Tom Adlam, at that time a second lieutenant, almost single handily turned the tide of battle in his fearless storming of the German trenches. Adlam, a man with a self-confessed nervous disposition, seems to play down his role in the attack, which saw British forces establish a foothold on the heavily defended German line.

Tom Edwin Adlam was born on 21 October 1893 in Waterloo Gardens, Salisbury. After leaving school he trained as a teacher and found himself at Brook Street Council School, Basingstoke. As well as teaching, Adlam joined the Territorial Army in 1912 where he worked his way up to the rank of sergeant. Here, he received basic army training and, when war broke out in 1914, he was pressed into service with the rank of second lieutenant. No additional officer training was available but Adlam was able to make up for much of what he didn't receive. In his eyes, a sergeant would need the knowledge of a platoon commander and so learnt any other information he needed on the job.

Adlam did receive some specialist training as he was commissioned as a bombing officer. This differed from the modern use of the word and was used to describe men trained rigorously in the use of grenades, both Allied and enemy. From mechanisms and tactics, including attacking and clearing trench systems, bombing officers were taught to wield grenades with great proficiency. These men would stand out with the red grenade badge on their right arms. This training would turn out to be invaluable as Adlam described the five-inch Mills bombs as having enough weight to wrench an arm out of its socket if thrown incorrectly. His cricket days would be of great help refining his technique of using either arm to throw a bomb upward of 40 feet.

After this training was complete he was assigned to 7th Battalion, Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire regiment, 54th Brigade, 18th Division, a Pals Battalion with fellow teachers making up his squad mates and their commanding officer being the headmaster of the school. While they were preparing for deployment in England, the rest of the 7th Battalion had been ordered forward on the first day of the Somme and suffered heavy losses in the assault. They were one of the few British battalions that entered and cleared the German trenches assigned to them, in contrast to many other units that were beaten back. Several weeks later the battalion would suffer massive losses in the deadly assault on Trones Wood.

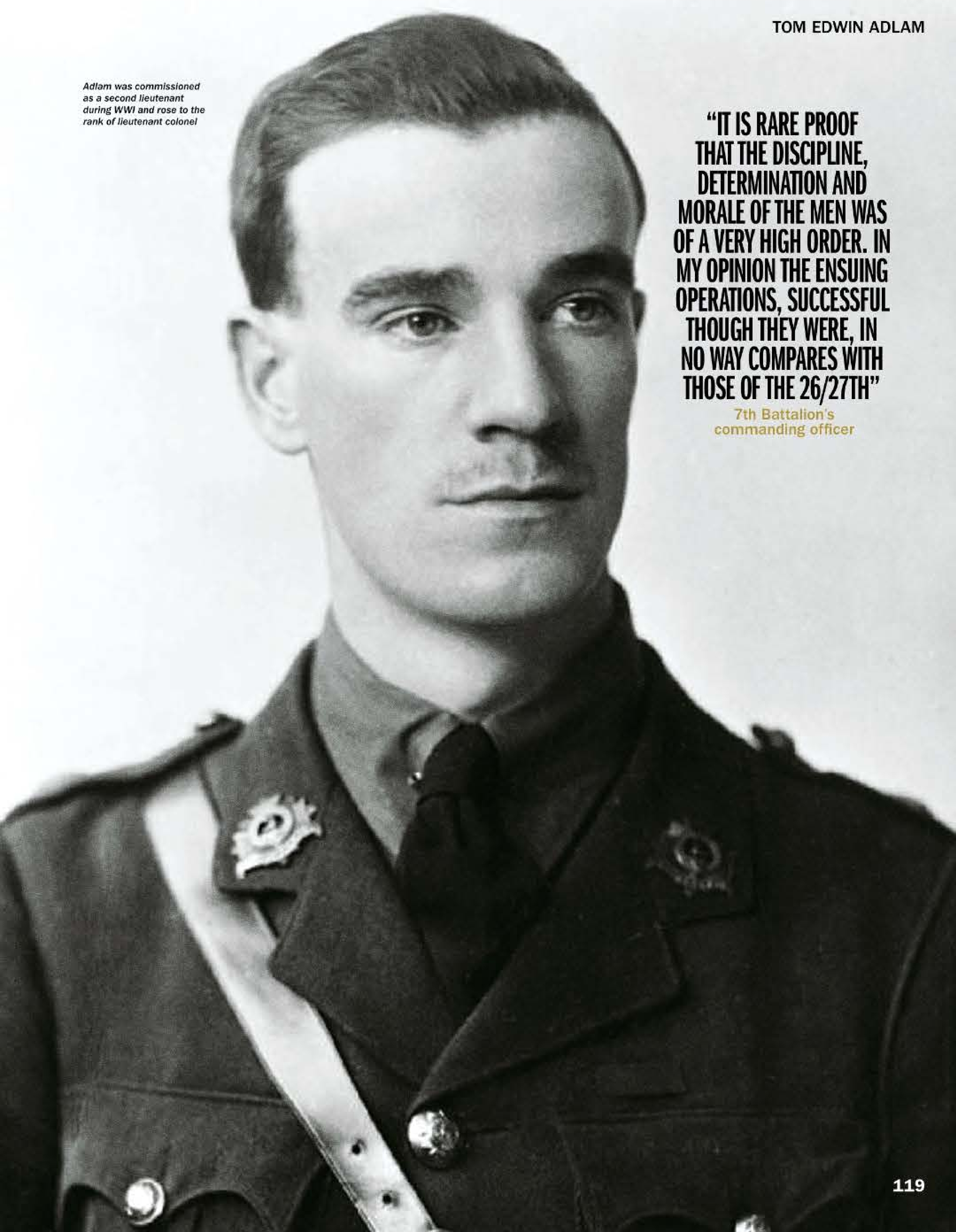


These casualties were so high that reinforcements had to be shipped over from Britain, and this is where Adlam and the rest entered the field. Sceptical of some peoples' view of the war being over by Christmas, Adlam nevertheless put his conservative estimate at the conflict lasting one year. After the horrific loss of life on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, this estimate fast became a dream for both Adlam and his fellow teachers on the fields of Flanders.

Life on the Western Front was, at times, bad or as Adlam put it, "bloody awful". Even with inside billets and access to a change of clothes, one of the perks of being an officer, the conditions were still woeful, but Adlam remarked that the men managed to stay remarkably cheerful despite this. Adlam, and another young man named Cartwright, turned out to be the lucky ones of the regiment as they were never troubled with lice or any other insects, even joking with each other as other men stripped to their waist trying to rid themselves of the vermin.

Adlam almost didn't participate in the battle as, after receiving news of his mother's passing, the army offered leave to attend the funeral. An adjutant officer talked him out of leaving, stating that the ceremony would be over by the time he got back and that he couldn't do any good back home, so it was best to stay on the front. Taking the officer's advice, Adlam stayed in France. This innocuous decision would pave the way for one of the finest military feats in the battalion's history.

***Left:** Members of the 7th Battalion pass through a French village on their way to the front*



Adlam was commissioned as a second lieutenant during WWI and rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel

"IT IS RARE PROOF THAT THE DISCIPLINE, DETERMINATION AND MORALE OF THE MEN WAS OF A VERY HIGH ORDER. IN MY OPINION THE ENSUING OPERATIONS, SUCCESSFUL THOUGH THEY WERE, IN NO WAY COMPARES WITH THOSE OF THE 26/27TH"

7th Battalion's commanding officer

The 7th would be placed at the forefront of the attack on the village of Thiepval and a mighty defensive fortification called Schwaben Redoubt, known as the 'Pope's nose'. It was their task to storm these positions and wrestle it from German hands. This was no easy task, seeing as the redoubt was fortified with well dug trench systems, complex tangles of barbed wire and multiple machine-gun nests. The 36th Ulster and 49th West Yorkshire Divisions had both failed to secure this position during the initial stages of the battle and now it fell to Adlam's unit to make yet another attempt. If this position could be taken it would dominate the German frontline from North to South in the surrounding area.

On the morning of the 26 September, Adlam led his men towards the front lines through harassing German artillery fire, with British guns answering in kind. Once in position, battalion officers formed a plan of attack and a night assault on the village of Theipval was decided. This attack was instigated to straighten up the British line, with C and D companies creeping forward in the predawn gloom. Visibility was abysmal and the men soon became lost in the darkness. As Adlam and C Company neared their positions the advantage had fled, as morning light started to creep over the village. With attack orders still standing C Company charged into the fray and almost immediately found themselves pinned down in shell holes, with machine-gun fire rattling over their heads.

At this point in the line the British were only 100 yards from the German trenches. Seizing the initiative, Adlam began dashing around the battlefield, gathering men together for an assault. He gave an account of the engagement in an interview for the Imperial War Museum, "I thought, 'We've got to get this trench somehow…' So I went crawling along from shell hole to shell hole, 'til I came to the officer in charge of the next platoon. He said 'I'm going to wait until it gets dark then crawl back, we can't go forward.' I said, 'Well, I think I can!' He shook hands with me solemnly and said 'Goodbye, old man!'. I said, 'Don't be such a damn fool, I'll get back alright, I'm quite sure I can get back.'"

"THIS MINOR OPERATION CAME UNDER VERY HEAVY MACHINE-GUN AND RIFLE FIRE. SECOND LIEUTENANT ADLAM, REALISING THAT TIME WAS ALL-IMPORTANT, RUSHED FROM SHELL-HOLE TO SHELL-HOLE UNDER HEAVY FIRE, COLLECTING MEN FOR A SUDDEN RUSH, AND FOR THIS PURPOSE ALSO COLLECTED MANY ENEMY GRENADES."

An extract of his Victoria Cross citation found in the *London Gazette*, dated 25 November 1916

Worry didn't seem to enter Adlam's mind as he gathered men for the assault. Utilising his training he instructed each man to pull the pin on his grenade, run two or three yards and hurl the explosive at the German trench. This opening salvo created a break in the German lines that the British then rushed into. Initially, each man carried two Mills bombs, but after these were exhausted Adlam, had the men gather up German explosives, which were lying around by the bagful in the trench. Adlam had observed German grenades being thrown at British troops usually had a delay of two to three seconds before exploding, somewhat reducing their effectiveness. After carrying out a rather dangerous experiment, Adlam found holding the grenade for a longer period of time before throwing it reduced the delay and resulted in a more effective blast. He would later reflect that the Germans must have been rather unnerved after seeing their own explosives raining down on them.

Freshly supplied, the 7th Bedford rushed through the trench flushing out any Germans they found. The machine-gun position proved a stauncher obstacle and, with bullets whizzing over his head, Adlam subjected the nest to unrelenting barrage of explosives. With the position neutralised the Germans began falling back. Seeing the enemy wavering, the British soldiers gave a great shout and as one charged through the remaining trench system, routing the Germans completely. Tom Adlam, wounded in the leg during combat, and his handful of men had taken a heavily defended objective that had already repulsed several attempts.

After the initial fighting had subsided, Adlam was instrumental in securing the position,

Below: The Mills bomb was the first modern fragmentation grenade used by the British Army





German prisoners are escorted to the British lines during the battle



Stretcher bearers carrying a wounded man over the top of a trench in the village of Thiepval

tirelessly setting up defensive positions and flushing out the last pockets of German resistance. His actions saw the over 100 Germans being taken prisoner. A and B Companies were sent in to secure these new acquired positions as Adlam and his men prepared for the assault on the redoubt itself.

The next attack would come a day later, the fighting was much like the previous engagement with grenades being utilised to effectively clear the trenches of enemies. At this point Adlam's right arm had been wounded, so he immediately switched to his left, finding that his aim was just as deadly. After an officer bandaged his wound he was ordered back from the frontline, he had done more than enough.

His last action was to personally escort 12 prisoners he had captured back with him. These two days of frenzied fighting saw the British secure a significant foothold in the redoubt, with the rest of the position being fully secured the next month.

Congratulatory messages and accolades were pouring in from all echelons of command, including Field Marshall Haig. Dozens of gallantry awards were issued with the most prestigious, the Victoria Cross, being awarded to Tom Adlam for his unwavering bravery and leadership. Adlam would hear of his Victoria Cross recommendation second-hand after a night of celebration back in England. In true modest fashion, Adlam downplayed his courage and leadership as an oddity, ("Of course, I was abnormal at the time: I didn't feel that there was any danger at all at that moment.") but was presented with 12 telegrams full of congratulations from family and friends.

"ON THE FOLLOWING DAY HE AGAIN DISPLAYED COURAGE OF THE HIGHEST ORDER, AND, THOUGH AGAIN WOUNDED AND UNABLE TO THROW BOMBS, HE CONTINUED TO LEAD HIS MEN. HIS MAGNIFICENT EXAMPLE OF VALOUR, COUPLED WITH THE SKILFUL HANDLING OF THE SITUATION, PRODUCED FAR-REACHING RESULTS"

An extract of his Victoria Cross citation found in the *London Gazette*, dated 25 November 1916

Confused, he telegrammed his father asking why he had received them. His father responded that the press had been asking his family for pictures of Adlam to use in their articles. Strangely, nobody had thought to tell Adlam himself that his name was put forward for the award. After some downtime in England, Adlam was ready for transfer to Singapore, a trip that never came as armistice was declared in 1918.

Following the end of the war, Tom Adlam became headmaster of the village school in Blackmoor, Hampshire, where he raised four children with his wife, Ivy. When conflict erupted again in 1939, Adlam was again called to service and rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel in 1944. After a long and full life, on 28 May 1975, Tom Adlam passed away during a family holiday, aged 81. He is buried in St Matthew's Churchyard, Blackmoor.

Images: Alamy, Getty

NOEL CHAVASSE

An Olympian turned army doctor whose acts of bravery on the Western Front earned him not one, but two Victoria Crosses

WORDS JACK GRIFFITHS

Looking after your own skin in war is tough enough, but being responsible for others while bullets zip over your head is another level. Captain Noel Chavasse was one of a rare breed of men willing to put their lives on the line to save others during the four years of horror on the Western Front. Born on 9 November 1884 in Oxford and later raised in Liverpool, Chavasse was the son of a bishop and one of seven children. His religious upbringing meant he obtained strong beliefs and a balanced temperament from regular Sunday observance, and it was ingrained in him from a young age to help those less fortunate than himself.

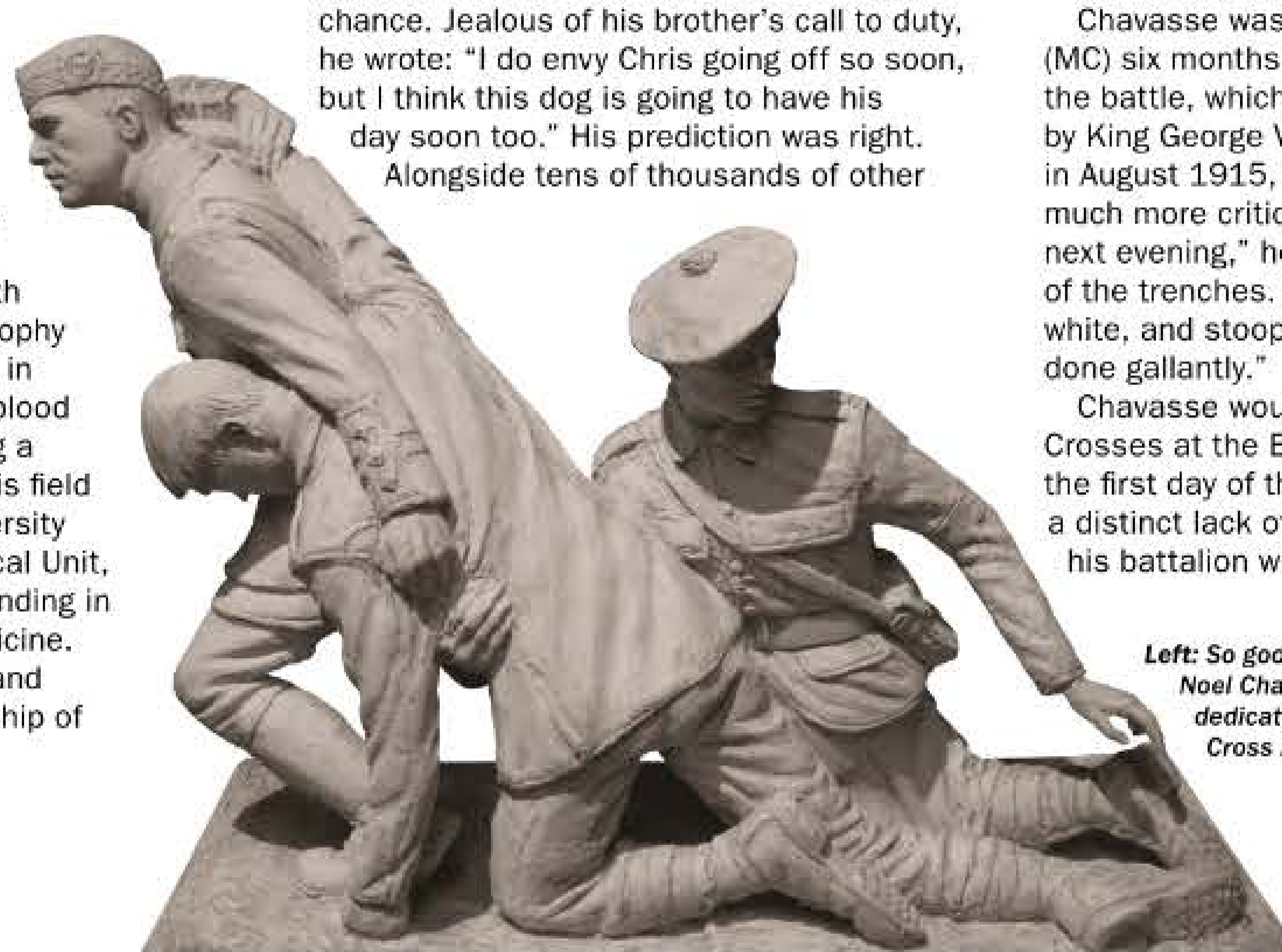
Before turning his hand to medicine, Chavasse was also a keen rugby and lacrosse player and even represented Team GB at the 1908 London Olympics, running in the heats of the 400 metres along with his identical twin brother Christopher. Putting his sporting and athletic career to one side, Chavasse studied medicine and qualified as a doctor in 1912 after graduating with first-class honours in philosophy from Trinity College, Oxford, in 1907. He went on to study blood plasma for a year, becoming a prize-winning academic in his field and joining the Oxford University Officer Training Corps Medical Unit, which gave him a solid grounding in the practice of military medicine. After a brief stint in Dublin and acceptance into the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons, he became an expert in orthopaedics, and both the house physician and house surgeon of the Royal Southern Hospital in Liverpool. This education allowed Chavasse to carry out his passion of helping those in need. Like every young man in England, however, his world would be turned upside down by the outbreak of World War I.

Commissioned into the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) as a lieutenant in 1913, Chavasse's letters from the time show a very positive attitude towards the possibility of entering the war. "If ever I get sent to the front with a regiment, I shall almost shed tears of joy," wrote Chavasse in a letter. Noel wasn't the only Chavasse to be sent to war. His twin brother Christopher was appointed as a chaplain in the Royal Army Chaplain's Department and had already stepped ashore on mainland Europe before Noel got the chance. Jealous of his brother's call to duty, he wrote: "I do envy Chris going off so soon, but I think this dog is going to have his day soon too." His prediction was right.

Alongside tens of thousands of other young British men, Chavasse was shipped over to the continent in 1914 to serve on the Western Front in both France and Belgium. He was part of the Liverpool Scottish Unit, and from the word go, Chavasse, a triage and wound-dressing expert, was inundated with soldiers suffering from trench foot and all manner of conditions. Believing God was on his side and possessing an unwavering patriotism, many of the troops soon became aware of his enthusiastic and driven nature. His first taste of battle came at Hooge near Ypres in 1915. One of the fiercest battles of what was fast becoming a bloody war, 900 men from Chavasse's battalion died with only 140 surviving the German onslaught of gunfire and poison gas. The young doctor ventured into no man's land for more than 48 hours and only stopped when he was convinced that there was no one else who required treatment.

Chavasse was awarded the Military Cross (MC) six months later for his bravery during the battle, which was given to him personally by King George V. He was promoted to captain in August 1915, but had now established a much more critical outlook on the war. "The next evening," he wrote, "the men came out of the trenches. The young men were haggard, white, and stooped like old men, but they had done gallantly."

Chavasse would earn the first of his Victoria Crosses at the Battle of the Somme. It was the first day of the offensive and, despite a distinct lack of any reconnaissance, his battalion was ordered to assault the



***Left:** So good, they rewarded him twice. Noel Chavasse has at least 16 memorials dedicated to him, the most of any Victoria Cross holder*



"LETTERS FROM THE FRONT HAVE CONSTANTLY TOLD HOW EAGER HE WAS, HOW READY HE WAS TO EXPOSE HIMSELF TO DANGERS BEYOND THOSE CALLED FOR IN THE DISCHARGE OF HIS DUTIES"

Extract from an article in the *Liverpool Daily Post & Mercury* newspaper

A man of great integrity, Chavasse dipped into his own pockets and bought 1,000 socks to help his battalion survive the harsh conditions of the Western Front

"HELL WOULD HAVE BEEN HEAVEN COMPARED TO THE PLACE HE WAS IN, BUT HE NEVER TROUBLED ABOUT IT"

A Canadian machine gunner in an interview with the *Liverpool Daily Post & Mercury* newspaper

fortified village of Guillemont at 4.20am on 27 July 1916. In what would become one of the bloodiest battles in the history of war, many British lives were lost at the hands of the Germans, with the 10th Battalion among them. 189 men out of 600 were gunned down within a matter of hours.

With the sheer amount of men dying in the mud, Chavasse was overwhelmed with casualties. Incredibly overworked, the doctor laboured long into the night, tending to as many of his companions as possible and making sure he picked up as many identity discs as he could. The next day he recruited a stretcher-bearer to work alongside him and scampered along the lines, twice being hit by shrapnel but still summoning the stamina to carry a wounded soldier 500 metres (1,640 feet) to safety.

His heroics weren't finished there and, taking matters into his own hands, Chavasse assembled a team of 20 volunteers who helped him miraculously rescue three men from a shell hole that was just 23 metres (75 feet) from the German frontline. His battalion had now been pinned down by gunfire for two days but it is estimated that he rescued 20 seriously wounded men. He received his medal at Buckingham Palace, February 1917.

The Somme had a profound effect on the battle-weary captain, who was now bitter about his country's involvement in the war, stating in one of his letters: "We all hate the war worse than we thought we could." However, it was obvious that there was still some fight in him, with a quote from the same period that showed his trademark helpful nature was still intact: "It is only the faces of the men that keep me anxious to help them at all times." This determined attitude helped Chavasse make what would end up being a life-changing decision. After being awarded the VC, he could have easily withdrawn behind the lines and taken up a surgeon's post in a base hospital. This safer role would have matched his skills perfectly, but he declined, preferring to be on the frontline.

World War I saw a huge development and investment in medical equipment and medicine. Warfare had come a long way since the 19th century and modern machine guns, artillery shells and tanks could cause serious damage to the human body. It wasn't until 1917 that the idea of stockpiling blood was first put into practice, and often there was not much Chavasse and his fellow doctors and medics could do apart from stretcher the wounded off the battlefield as quickly as possible and refer them via motor ambulance to the nearest casualty clearing station.

One of the great successes of wartime medical procedures was the Thomas Splint. Invented by Welsh surgeon Hugh Owen Thomas, the strap ensured that 80 per cent of solders with broken femurs survived. Prior to

Below: Canadian soldiers make their way across the muddy battlefield of Passchendaele, 1917







Illustration: Ed Crooks



the invention, the statistic was the other way round, and 80 per cent who suffered the injury died from their wounds.

For his part, Chavasse trained all his stretcher-bearers in first aid as well as reworking the field hospitals he served in to ensure they were as sanitary as possible. He provided warm and dry clothing whenever possible and advised the men to always have a hot bath if the opportunity arose. He was also one of the few who understood shell shock before it was commonly identified in medical circles. To this doctor, hygiene to prevent lice, avoiding trench foot and keeping a positive mental attitude were vital. Despite his talent, Chavasse never rose higher than captain – likely due to his criticism of his superiors and his empathy towards the Germans on the other side of no man's land.

After the Somme, Chavasse's parents heard of their son's wounds but their fears were allayed with the following letter: "Don't be in the least upset if you hear I am wounded. It is absolutely nothing. The merest particle of shell just frisked me. I did not even know about it until I undressed at night," he said, with only a hint of understatement. He also calmed their nerves by stating that "his blood was not heroic." He was a doctor who was equally as humble as he was skilled.

Next, Chavasse found himself thrust into the Third Battle of Ypres (Battle of Passchendaele). By now he was a veteran of the field, and the doctor began by setting up an advanced first-aid post in a captured German dugout to be able to treat the troops closer to the action. Unfortunately, by the start of August, the British were struggling to advance on enemy strongpoints and the Imperial German Army was becoming relentless in its artillery barrages, constantly shelling the position.

Above: Many soldiers owe their lives to the work of Noel Chavasse in the field

Mustard gas had killed 141 men by the time Chavasse was struck in the head, fracturing his skull. Receiving treatment, he was advised to leave the frontline and seek further medical attention, but refused and promptly returned to his post. Continued bombardment led to him receiving two more head injuries, but he stuck to his duty, tending to an almost constant stream of wounded men, despite



As well as his Victoria Crosses, Chavasse was also awarded a Military Cross, a 1914 Star and Clasp, a British War Medal, a Victory Medal and an MiD Oakleaf

CHAVASSE'S VICTORIA CROSS CITATIONS

FIRST VC CITATION

"Altogether he saved the lives of some 20 badly wounded men, besides the ordinary cases which passed through his hands. His courage and self-sacrifice were beyond praise."

SECOND VC CITATION

"Though severely wounded early in the action whilst carrying a wounded soldier to the dressing station, he refused to leave his post, and for two days not only continued to perform his duties but went out repeatedly under enemy fire to search for and attend to the wounded who were lying out. During these searches, although practically without food, he assisted to carry a number of badly wounded men over heavy and difficult ground. By his extraordinary energy and inspiring example he was instrumental in rescuing many who would have otherwise undoubtedly succumbed under the bad weather conditions. This devoted and gallant officer subsequently died of his wounds."

"I CONSTANTLY MET YOUR SON AND APPRECIATED HIS WORK. HE WAS QUITE THE MOST GALLANT AND MODEST MAN I HAVE EVER MET, AND I SHOULD THINK THE BEST LIKED"

A letter sent to Chavasse's parents by Brig-Gen LG Wilkinson, who commanded the 166th Brigade until April 1917

being incredibly weary, hungry and now in excruciating pain. Sadly, Chavasse's stubborn refusal to quit led to his untimely death.

While taking a rare break, another shell hit the roof of the bunker and the explosion screamed through the back door. The doctor was left with a severe stomach wound and everyone within the bunker walls was either killed or badly wounded. Chavasse, now virtually unrecognisable due to his injuries, used his final ounce of strength to crawl for half a mile to signal for aid.

Help eventually arrived and he managed to make it to a clearing station, but died of his wounds two days later at about 1pm on 4 August aged just 32. Prior to passing away, his final words were reserved for his fiancée Gladys, and he simply said: "Duty called and called me to obey," before his body gave in. He was due to marry Gladys later that month and she had even moved to Paris to be near to him. Noel's second Victoria Cross was not much solace for his grief-stricken fiancée.

Noel Chavasse was buried in Brandhoek at Vlamertinghe New Military Cemetery in Belgium about 20 kilometres (12.7 miles) from the battlefield at Passchendaele, and the remaining men of his regiment and many other medical officers were all in attendance. There was also a memorial service held in his honour in the Parish Church of St Nicholas in Liverpool, and his parents, Francis and Edith, received his posthumous medal in his honour.

A bronze memorial was unveiled in August 2008 and stands outside 19 Abercromby Square, Liverpool, the Chavasse family home. Christopher survived the war, rising to the equivalent rank of lieutenant colonel, and their younger brother, Bernard, also served as a battalion medical officer. Sadly, the youngest Chavasse brother, Aidan, didn't make it through the war and passed away on 4 July 1917 in the Ypres Salient. His family didn't initially realise he had passed and sent out a series of enquiries before his death was made official in February 1918.

Both Bernard and Christopher were awarded the Military Cross for their service. It wasn't just the male members of the family who served king and country in World War I, though. Younger sister May worked as a war maid in the Liverpool Merchants mobile hospital in Étaples in northern France. Her work was highly regarded and she received a special mention in dispatches.

Chavasse's memory lives on in the hearts of Liverpudlians, and in a 2003 poll of the '100 greatest Merseysiders', he came in third place above legendary football manager Bill Shankly, renowned 19th-century politician William Gladstone and former Beatle George Harrison. Up until her death in 1962, Chavasse's fiancée Gladys regularly visited the grave of her husband-to-be and would annually mark the anniversary of his death with an 'in memoriam' notice in the *Times* newspaper.

Captain Noel Godfrey Chavasse remains one of the most highly decorated British servicemen of the war, as well as the only man to have received two Victoria Crosses during the conflict. Never firing a single shot in anger, he worked tirelessly for long periods often without food and water. He wasn't afraid to run right in front of German cross hairs to save wounded troops and would search throughout the night for anyone left behind in no man's land. No matter how faint he felt or how many injuries he sustained, he would be there, bounding across muddy shrapnel-filled fields to help his fellow man.



Chavasse's headstone represents both of his VCs. The inscription was chosen by his father and reads: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"

DOUBLE VICTORIA CROSS RECIPIENTS

CAPTAIN ARTHUR MARTIN-LEAKE

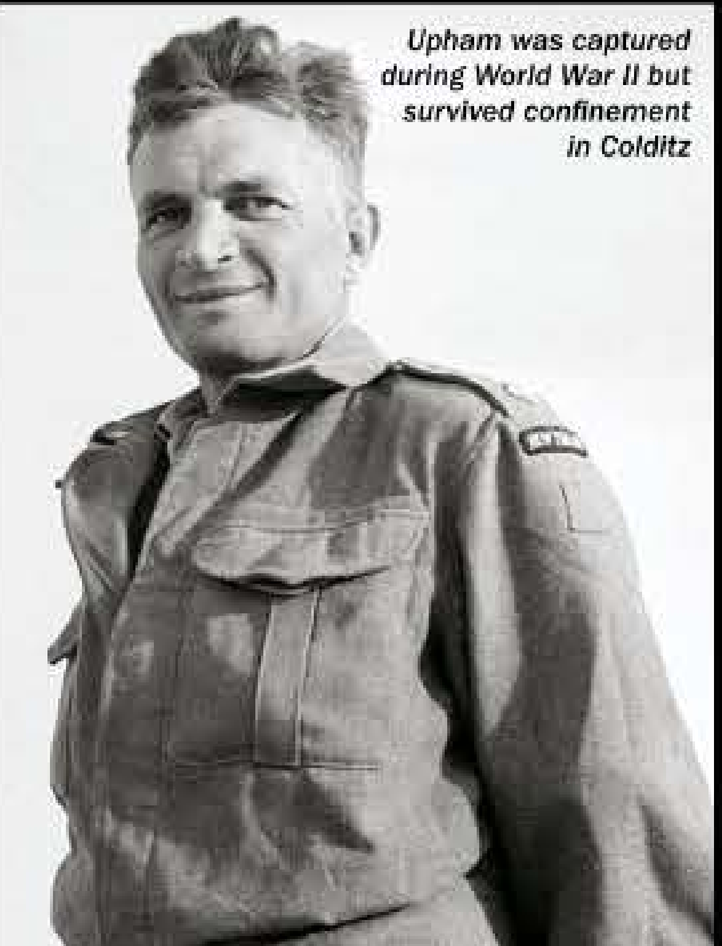
Another man involved in army surgery, Martin-Leake won his first VC in 1902 during the Boer War after treating wounded soldiers just 100 metres (328 feet) from an enemy trench. He was shot by a Boer rifle but soldiered on until he collapsed from exhaustion. His second VC was awarded 12 years later on the Western Front as he once again saved many of his comrades while under heavy fire.



On the battlefield, Martin-Leake would demand that water be given to the wounded before him

CAPTAIN CHARLES UPHAM

Charles Upham's first VC was awarded for his outstanding leadership during the Allied defeat at the 1941 Battle of Crete. Already nursing a wound from a mortar shell, the brave captain carried a wounded soldier out of the firing line, and eight days later he single-handedly killed 22 Germans. Several years later he received the accolade once again when he brought down a tank despite one of his arms being shattered by machine-gun fire.



Upham was captured during World War II but survived confinement in Colditz

Images: Alamy; Ed Crooks

ALVIN C YORK

In one of the most infamous assaults of World War I, Sergeant York defied the odds and took 132 German soldiers prisoner with a handful of men

WORDS **DOM RESEIGH-LINCOLN**

Considering the icon of American military success that he would become, Sergeant Alvin C York of the 82nd Division was an unlikely candidate for warfare. A reformed violent alcoholic and devout Christian, the Tennessee-born son of a blacksmith originally tried to avoid enlisting for military service – not because he wanted to dodge the responsibility of serving his country, but rather because he didn't believe in taking up arms against his fellow man.

"I was worried clean through. I didn't want to go and kill," he remarked at a lecture later in his life. "I believed in my Bible." But his request for conscientious objection (a position he would later deny) was formally rejected and he was soon shipped off to fight. Yet for all protestations, Sergeant York would perform one of the most daring acts of the entire conflict and earn the most prestigious commendation in the US military: the Medal of Honor.

The third of 11 children, Alvin C York was born on 13 December 1887 into an impoverished family living in Pall Mall, Tennessee. The United States was only two decades removed from the onslaught of the civil war when York entered the world and the former secessionist state was still recovering from the devastating domestic conflict. Times were hard. As such, York, like his seven brothers, spent only nine months in formal education before his father William brought him home to work full time on the farm.

From an early age, the young York was no stranger to the hard graft of farm work. When his father died in November 1911, the running of the household fell to the 23-year-old (his two older brothers Henry and Joseph had already moved out of the family home) and he soon took up a number of jobs, including logging and working on the local railway. He was devoted to his family, but was also a burgeoning alcoholic, prone to brawls and dust-ups in local bars.

He still attended church on a regular basis with his devout mother and siblings, but it wasn't until January 1915 that York finally left the alcohol behind and embraced his faith. While he was raised a Methodist, it was a more recent branch of the Christian faith that drew his attention. His new congregation, the Church of Christ in Christian Union, had no official pacifist doctrines per se, but it did shun violence as much as it opposed division between the many Christian sects.

On 5 June 1917, the Selective Service Act came into effect and men aged between 21 and 30 were legally bound to enlist for military service. York attempted to seek conscientious objection on the grounds of his stringent new spiritual beliefs, but as the Union wasn't recognised as an official branch, his request was denied. He was drafted into the US Army and assigned to Company G, 328th Infantry Regiment, 82nd Infantry Division at Camp Gordon, Georgia, but his new posting didn't sway his fears. Troubled by the war, York was granted ten days of leave; when he returned, he came with the belief that God intended him to fight, devoting himself to his new mission with all the fervour he'd given his new church.

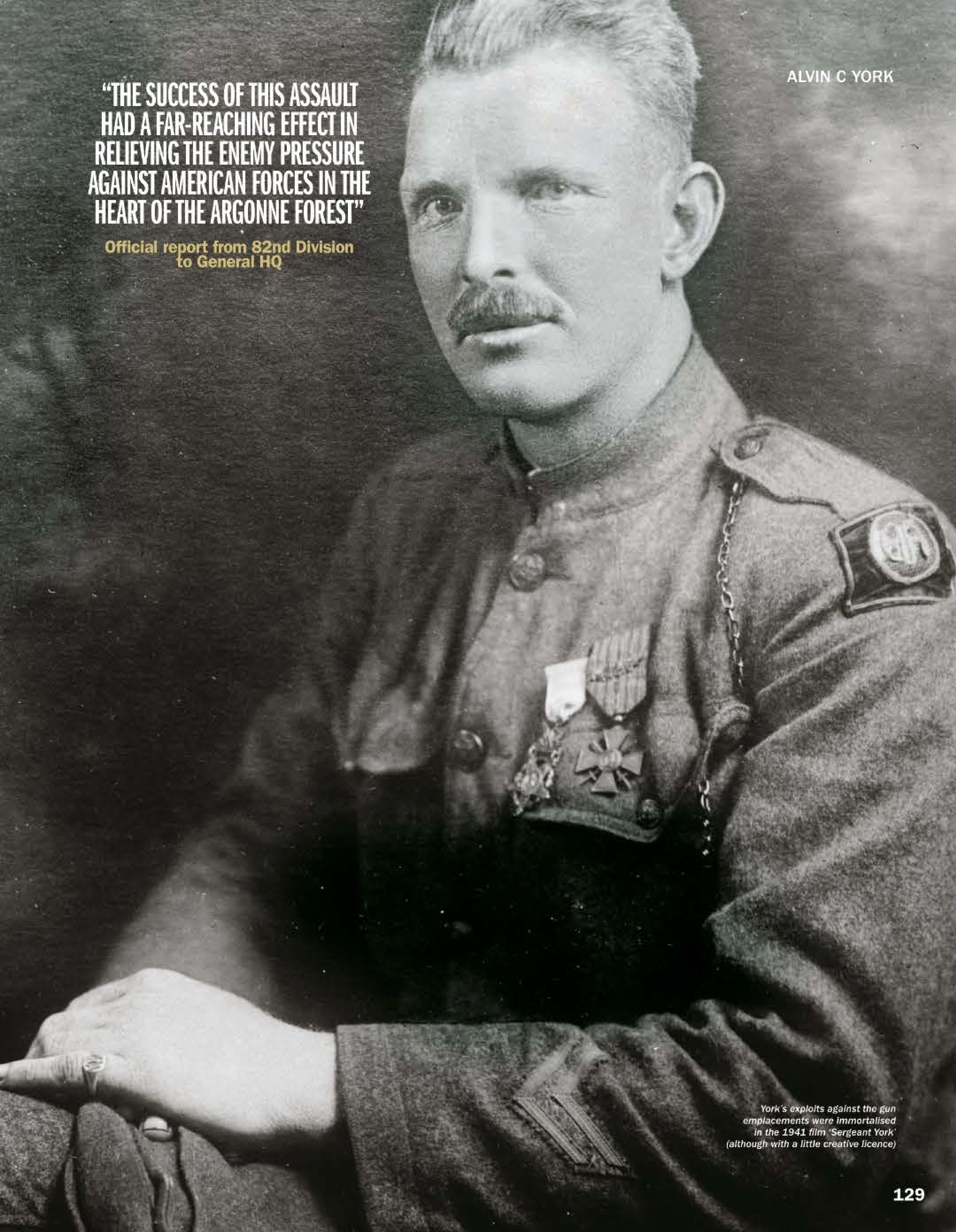
Below: York became a figurehead for promoting the US military's successes in World War I, but he never grew comfortable with this new fame



York and his division were then posted to France to take part in the US Army's first offensive of World War I, the Saint Mihiel Offensive. Up until this point, the United States had attempted to stay out of the conflict, but the unrestricted and vicious attacks from German submarines had proved an encroachment too far, with President Woodrow Wilson requesting Congress officially declare war in April that year.

When US Army forces, including the US Air Army Service (later known as the US Air Force) arrived in north-east France in September 1917, they caught the Germans in a state of retreat. The unprepared enemy scrambled to react to the new American military presence, and York (now a corporal) and his fellow compatriots helped secure an Allied victory in a matter of a few days. The 82nd Division was then shifted further north to take part in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, one of the final battles of World War I.

On 8 October, Allied forces, including the 82nd, successfully took Hill 223, located along the Decauville railway line north of Chatel-Chéhéry. However, as forces swarmed down the hill on the other side, they found the triangular valley at the bottom was a death trap. German machine-gun emplacements were encamped on ridges around the valley and they gunned down Allied soldiers in their droves. Pulling back to a safe distance, it was decided that the only way to progress forward and take control of the Decauville railway was to manoeuvre around

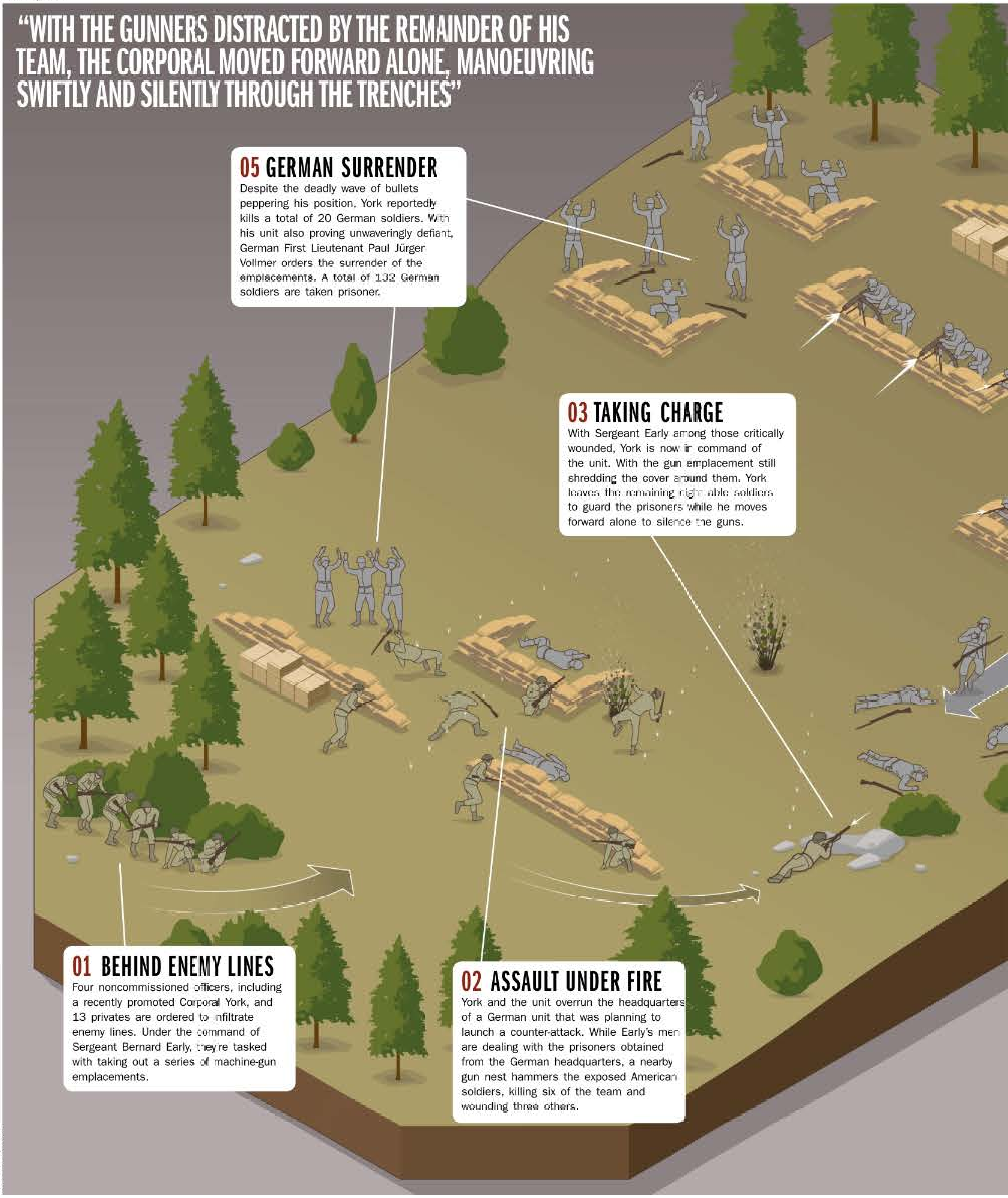


"THE SUCCESS OF THIS ASSAULT HAD A FAR-REACHING EFFECT IN RELIEVING THE ENEMY PRESSURE AGAINST AMERICAN FORCES IN THE HEART OF THE ARGONNE FOREST"

Official report from 82nd Division to General HQ

York's exploits against the gun emplacements were immortalised in the 1941 film 'Sergeant York' (although with a little creative licence)

"WITH THE GUNNERS DISTRACTED BY THE REMAINDER OF HIS TEAM, THE CORPORAL MOVED FORWARD ALONE, MANOEUVRING SWIFTLY AND SILENTLY THROUGH THE TRENCHES"



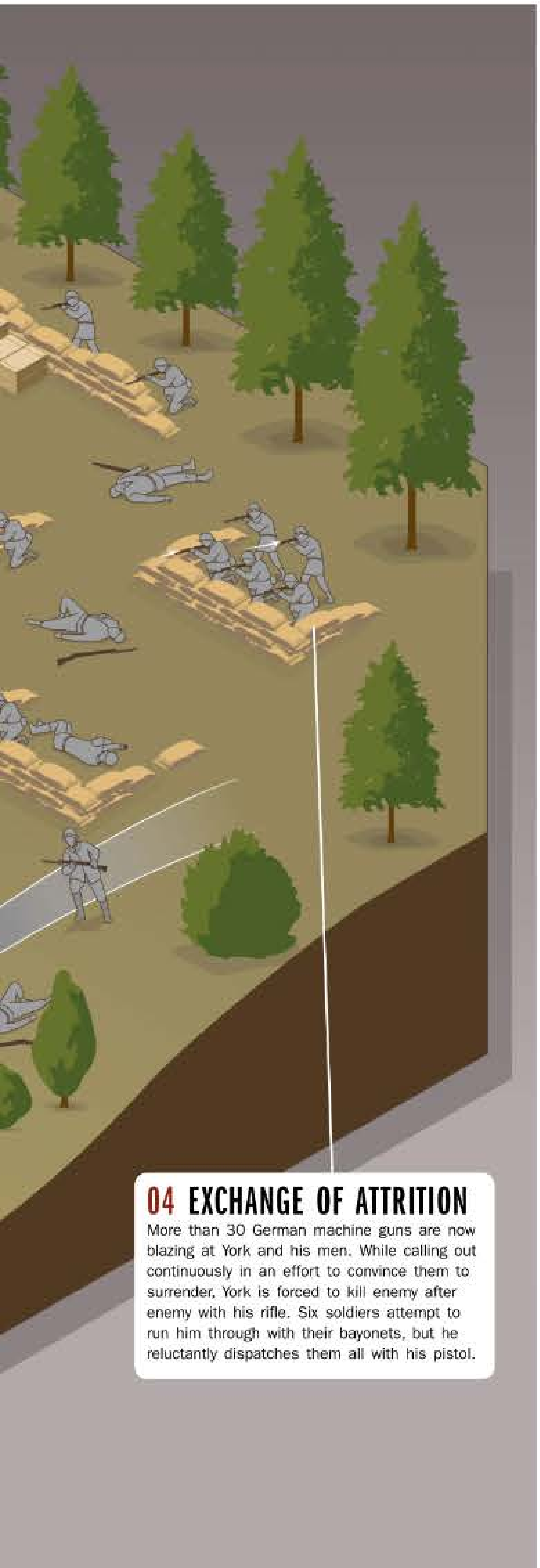
01 BEHIND ENEMY LINES
Four noncommissioned officers, including a recently promoted Corporal York, and 13 privates are ordered to infiltrate enemy lines. Under the command of Sergeant Bernard Early, they're tasked with taking out a series of machine-gun emplacements.

02 ASSAULT UNDER FIRE
York and the unit overrun the headquarters of a German unit that was planning to launch a counter-attack. While Early's men are dealing with the prisoners obtained from the German headquarters, a nearby gun nest hammers the exposed American soldiers, killing six of the team and wounding three others.

03 TAKING CHARGE
With Sergeant Early among those critically wounded, York is now in command of the unit. With the gun emplacement still shredding the cover around them, York leaves the remaining eight able soldiers to guard the prisoners while he moves forward alone to silence the guns.

05 GERMAN SURRENDER
Despite the deadly wave of bullets peppering his position, York reportedly kills a total of 20 German soldiers. With his unit also proving unwaveringly defiant, German First Lieutenant Paul Jürgen Vollmer orders the surrender of the emplacements. A total of 132 German soldiers are taken prisoner.

Acute Graphics



"FEARLESSLY LEADING SEVEN MEN, HE CHARGED WITH GREAT DARING A MACHINE-GUN NEST THAT WAS POURING DEADLY AND INCESSANT FIRE UPON HIS PLATOON"

Official citation for Sergeant York's Medal of Honor

the gun nests and silence them. A unit under the command of Sergeant Bernard Early was tasked with moving behind enemy lines and overrunning the emplacements. A total of four noncommissioned officers, including York, and 13 privates, used the large amount of brush and tall bushes to flank the gun nests, moving through woodland until they were positioned at the rear of the network. Working from such an advantageous position, Early, York and the rest of the unit were able to immediately overrun the main headquarters.

The tactic proved to be both a blessing and a curse for the team. Caught completely by surprise, the HQ was taken almost entirely without bloodshed and Early and his men took a large contingent of prisoners within minutes of beginning their offensive. Unfortunately, the covert nature of the assault was soon torn apart when one of the German soldiers manning a gun emplacement noticed the fracas and opened fire on the exposed unit. Six Americans were killed outright, and another three were critically injured in the opening salvo, including Early.

With his senior officer incapacitated, command of the unit was passed to York. By this stage, the gun emplacement was peppering the cover sheltering York, the wounded and those soldiers still able to fight. It had become clear that the unit wouldn't be able to silence the guns from their current position, so York ordered his men to stay where they were and continue exchanging fire. With the gunners distracted by the remainder of his team, the corporal moved forward alone, manoeuvring swiftly and silently through the trenches.

Lying prone and peeking over the embankments, York began sniping at the gunners, killing enemy after enemy as the Germans struggled to locate this unexpected source of fire. However, just because he had accepted that his life as a soldier was a calling from God didn't mean that he'd left his ideals behind in Georgia. He began calling out to the soldiers, imploring them to surrender and avoid further bloodshed, only returning fire when it was clear such a course of action was not a consideration. With his men also pressing the gun emplacement, a contingent of six German soldiers were dispatched to hunt him down. The kill team might have been successful had York not spied them in time, switching to his pistol and dispatching each one at close range.

York continued his assault on the machine-gun emplacement, picking off any soldier that was foolish enough to peer over the embankment. As time went by, the man in charge of the gun nest, First Lieutenant Paul Jürgen Vollmer, realised his men were too exposed and proceeded to offer his and his men's surrender to the lone sniper. York accepted and returned to American lines with 132 German prisoners in tow.

Some reports suggest York killed up to 20 German soldiers that morning, although he has always distanced himself from those claims as well as the propaganda that swirled around him upon his return. Yet whatever that final number may have been, Corporal York put his life on the line in one of the most daring acts of valour. He was swiftly promoted to sergeant and awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. Following the end of the war, all commendations were reviewed and York's medal was upgraded to the Medal of Honor in recognition of his actions in the final months of the conflict.

***Below:** The Meuse-Argonne Offensive was one of the costliest to American lives, with more than 26,000 dead*



EUGEN BINDER

Facing the enemy in brutal frontline engagements, this sergeant was decorated with the highest honours for his bravery in World War I

WORDS **ROB SCHÄFER**

Sergeant Eugen Binder joined the ranks of Infanterie-Regiment Nr 126 'Grossherzog Friedrich von Baden' (8 Württembergisches) upon mobilisation on 4 August 1914. Distinguishing himself in combat throughout the war, he was wounded five times and decorated with three prestigious gallantry awards. He was a true Frontschwein (frontline pig) who left three harrowing accounts of his wartime actions. The Golden Military Merit Medal of the Kingdom of Württemberg was awarded 4,234 times throughout the war.

"I earned both classes of the Iron Cross during the fighting in the positions at Hooge in July 1915. On the evening of 19 July, the enemy had detonated a large mine under our trenches. The explosion had created a huge crater of hitherto unseen dimensions. More than 100 men of 7th and 8th company had been buried alive and a wealth of equipment, arms and material had been destroyed. Immediately afterwards, English assault troops had successfully taken possession of the crater and the trenches adjacent to it. During that time, I was serving as temporary machine gunner in 10th company, which formed part of the regimental reserve. At 10.30pm, our company gathered to participate in the counterattack to retake the mine crater.

"The company advanced and immediately came under fire from the enemy artillery. A number of men were killed and the advance stalled. There was no way to push forward the attack without suffering severe casualties, so the order to withdraw was given and the company retreated into the safety of the trenches. At 4am, another attempt was made. This time the company attacked from a different direction. A hand grenade squad of 8th company managed to push the English back while our company delivered a rapid suppressing fire trying to stop the English from bringing reinforcements forward.

"Using my rifle, I managed to shoot five Englishmen who were foolhardy enough to stick their heads over the crater's lip. Even though we finally managed to push the English out of the crater, we were unable to regain possession of it, so plans were made to retake it at a later time. For my actions on that night, I was put forward to be decorated with the Iron Cross 2nd Class.

"On 30 July, a new offensive operation was conducted to finally retake the crater and parts of the surrounding area south of Hooge and north of the chausse from the English. First Battalion and 6th company were chosen to conduct the assault. By then I had re-transferred to my post in 6th company. The attack had been meticulously planned and prepared. To support our assault we had been supplied with 20 flamethrowers. Advanced saps had been dug forward to reduce the amount of open ground that had to be covered. Under the protective fire of our mine throwers, artillery and flamethrowers, we launched our attack at about 4.30am with 2nd, 3rd and 6th company leading the assault. Shortly before we reached our objective, a German mine detonated amid our ranks, killing and wounding 12 men. While the other two companies made good progress, we were met by withering fire from two English machine guns that caused a number of casualties. Then suddenly we were within the English trench and a sharp fight in close quarters developed. Every man fought for himself. An English officer killed the man next to me with a shot from his revolver and was in turn bayoneted by the Gefreiter Wiesacher. A hand grenade landed just in front of me, instinctively I picked it up and threw it back into a group of English soldiers who were trying to find cover in the narrow entrance of a dug out. The explosion killed at least three of the enemy soldiers and wounded many more.

"The English fought on stubbornly and no mercy was given on either sides. The fight developed into a brawl in which pistols, fists and even teeth were used to annihilate the opposition. Soon, the first of the English began to drop their weapons and raised their hands in surrender. 20 prisoners were taken; strong

"USING MY RIFLE, I MANAGED TO SHOOT FIVE ENGLISHMEN WHO WERE FOOLHARDY ENOUGH TO STICK THEIR HEADS OVER THE CRATER'S LIP"



EUGEN BINDER

Sergeant Eugen Binder earned the 1st and 2nd Class of the Iron Cross as well as the Golden Military Merit Medal of the Kingdom of Württemberg

***Far left:** The Iron Cross 1st and 2nd Class*


A German machine-gun unit wearing stahlhelms, which became standard issue partway through the war

"BY THE MORNING, THE HARASSING FIRE HAD REACHED THE STRENGTH OF A FRIGHTENING TORNADO, EACH IMPACTING SHELL SENDING UP A WITHERING HAIL OF STONE SPLINTERS"

and proud men belonging to VIII battalion of the King's Royal Rifle Corps. We immediately began to consolidate our new position while the remaining companies went forward to pursue the beaten enemy. For my actions on that day, I was awarded the Iron Cross 1st Class.

"It was on the fourth day of the great spring battle in France in 1918 that my regiment, the 126th, lay in front of the strongly fortified English position near Bapaume. On this day, the first line of the Bapaume defensive system was to be taken. All through the night, the enemy kept up a strong harassing fire with his artillery, targeting our rear areas along the road of Beugny to the brickworks at Mordries and the positions of the second and third battalions of the 126th Infantry Regiment, which ran along the railway embankment of Lebucquières.

"Our group tried to find cover behind and under four abandoned enemy railway wagons. By the morning, the harassing fire had reached the strength of a frightening tornado, each impacting shell sending up a withering hail of stone splinters from the railway line. The railway wagons offered only little protection and we soon began taking severe casualties. Many a comrade had to give his life there.

"Back then I was an Unteroffizier in command of the first group of 1st platoon, 9th company of the 126th Infantry Regiment. Rushing forward in bounds, one by one we began crossing the railway line. This was only possible due to the fire support given to us by the group of Unteroffizier Walker, who lay on our left. This neighbouring group effectively targeted our English opponents who, being situated on the high ground with four machine guns, kept directing a murderous fire on our groups.

"Nevertheless, we successfully crossed the railway line and a narrow stream after which my men and I took position about 20 metres in front of the English lines. Having lost connection to the comrades on our left and right, our situation was most critical. An Englishman shouted over to us, demanding our surrender. I asked my comrades if they would be willing to do so, but not a single one even thought about leaving me. A shout of "Go to


Above: The MG 08 was heavily based on the American Maxim gun, and various iterations of the gun emerged during the First World War





German soldiers are seen here assaulting an enemy position with flamethrowers and grenades



Flamethrowers were among the most destructive weapons to be developed during the war

"I TOLD MY GUNNER NUMBER TWO, KARL TRUCHSÄSS, TO LIGHT US SOME CIGARETTES FOR A FINAL SMOKE BEFORE DEATH, AS THERE WAS NO WAY THEY WOULD BE GETTING US ALIVE"

hell Tommy!" answered the English request once and for all. A daredevil dispatch carrier had, in the meantime, brought new orders – we were to fall back a few hundred meters as our own artillery would soon open up on the English positions. This we managed to do without suffering any casualties. After a barrage that lasted about 20 minutes, the assault on the enemy line commenced. With the men at my side, we charged across open ground towards the first English trench. A machine gun opened up and bullets whizzed past our heads with a deep humming sound. A light machine gun, brought forward on our right, provided some covering fire.

"Once inside the enemy trench, I dropped two English soldiers with a few shots from my pistol. A few others were killed or wounded by my men. Everywhere around us, English soldiers dropped their weapons and begged for mercy, but we didn't have time to take care of them as my small group and I charged further up the slope on our own. Here we found cover in a partially collapsed trench. We had just reached it when I noticed that an enemy counterattack was in full swing.

"Our own company had been completely dispersed by enemy shellfire and we all realised that we would have to take care of the business on our own. The enemy, at least two battalions strong, surged towards us, wave after wave in their conspicuous khaki coloured helmets. It was a frightening spectacle. Our job was clear; we had to contain this strong and dangerous enemy force for as long as possible. We could not know how long we would be able to survive against the numerically far superior foe.

"Wave after wave surged forward and was shredded to pieces by the fire of our light machine gun. Only seconds later, we had been spotted and a number of enemy machine guns brought down a hail of fire upon me and my little group, of which five men were killed outright. Now enemy batteries opened up in an attempt to annihilate our machine gun nest. To make our position less conspicuous, and to get rid of the steam clouds emitting from our glowing hot gun, I dismantled the lock to release the water from the cooling mantle. I then took over the gun myself and continued firing. When the barrel was glowing red from the heat, I removed it and replaced it with a spare one. As a precaution I had equipped my group with a set of three spare barrels; a decision that now paid off. Keeping up a rapid fire, we continued to replace the seething hot barrels in regular intervals.

"By now I had shot about 5,000 rounds at the enemy and I was lying in a pile of cartridge cases. Hundreds of khaki clad bodies lay dead and wounded in front of our gun, yet the situation was hopeless. There was no way to annihilate the foe completely. I told my gunner number two, Karl Truchsäss, to light us some cigarettes for a final smoke before death, as there was no way they would be getting us alive.

"Now it was only the two of us who were still alive. We only had 50 rounds of ammunition left. Checking my pistol, I noticed that it taken a hit from a shell splinter, which had made it unusable. After having fired my last 50 rounds towards the enemy, I laid on my back and finished my cigarette. I then noticed that the firing from the enemy side had ceased and that the English had withdrawn to their positions. After we had returned to Cambrai, our regimental commander, Major Götz, personally enquired which men had made up the group that had stood alone in the face of the English onslaught.

"This was how I earned the Golden Military Merit Medal."

GORDON FLOWERDEW

At the Battle of Moreuil Wood, this Lieutenant heroically led an outnumbered squadron of Canadian horsemen in a costly cavalry charge straight into German infantry, artillery and machine gun fire

WORDS ALEXANDER ZAKRZEWSKI

The British cavalry training manual of 1907 stated that modern weapons would never replace "the speed of the horse, the magnetism of the charge, and the terror of cold steel". It was an extraordinarily unrealistic statement, quickly proven wrong when war broke out just seven years later. However, old military traditions die hard. In 1918, when the Allied armies were seemingly on the verge of collapse, an intrepid young Canadian cavalry officer proved that, while the cavalry was no longer master of the battlefield, the spirit of the cavalier will never die.

On 21 March 1918 the German army launched Operation Michael, the first stage in its great Spring Offensive, which aimed to split the Allied armies and sweep the British out of Europe. Three German armies, led by battalions of well-trained storm troops, attacked the British Fifth and Third Armies along an 80-kilometre (50-mile) front, with the heaviest blow falling astride the Somme, where so much blood had been shed two years before. Within days, the British and French lines, undermanned and under-prepared for such a devastating attack, collapsed, and the Germans were advancing westward.

Their objective was the medieval town of Amiens, the crucial railway junction that linked the British and French armies. By taking Amiens, General Erich von Ludendorff, the architect of the offensive, hoped to create a gap from which the Allied armies could be pried apart. But on 28 March, after a week of continuous fighting, he was forced to briefly halt and allow his exhausted troops some rest. This pause gave the retreating Allies a much needed opportunity to regroup, reinforce and strike back. Among the units thrown into the fighting was the Canadian Cavalry Brigade.

When war broke out in 1914, Canada, like all other combatant countries, sent cavalry units to the front. According to the outdated doctrines of the time, they would be needed to exploit gaps in the enemy line and harry the enemy retreat. The Canadian Cavalry Brigade, which arrived in France in May 1915, included two regiments with a proud service record in the Boer War: the Royal Canadian Dragoons and Lord Strathcona's Horse. They were joined by two more Canadian units, the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery and eventually the Fort Garry Horse.

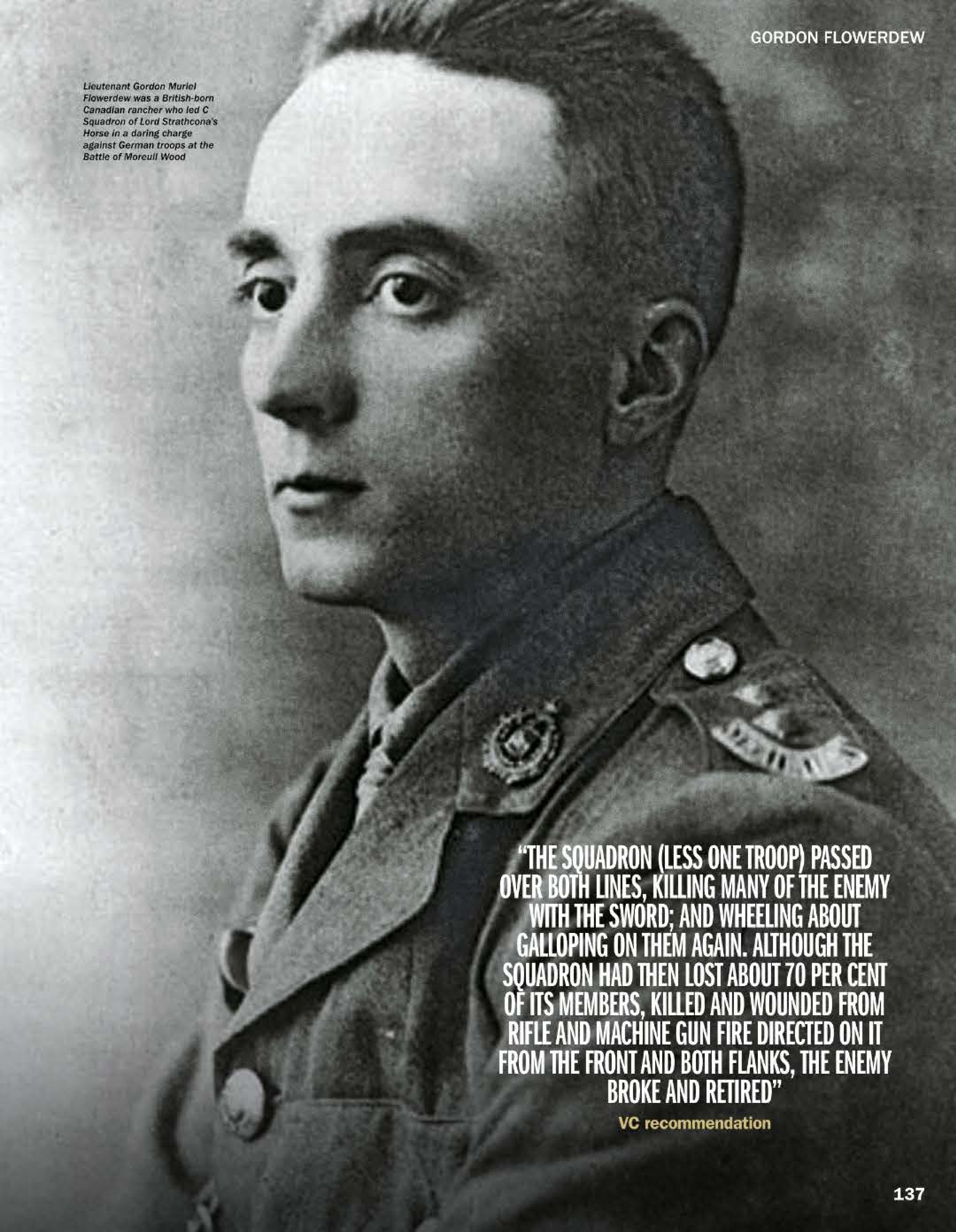
As with most cavalry units, the Canadian horsemen were quickly disillusioned by their role in the war. When they were not being sent dismounted into the trenches to make up for infantry losses, they found themselves an impotent bystander in a static defensive war, repeatedly ordered to 'stand to your horses' in anticipation of breakthroughs in the enemy line that never occurred. "The phrase commonly used was that we were to gallop through the 'G' in 'Gap'", one Canadian cavalry officer observed. "They might as well have aimed for the dot in 'futile'." That all changed in the spring of 1918 when the brigade suddenly found itself in the thick of the fighting.

> **"IT'S A CHARGE, BOYS, IT'S A CHARGE"**
> Gordon Flowerdew

In the early hours of 30 March, the Canadians were camped south of Amiens near the village of Guyencourt when they received orders to reinforce the French troops defending Moreuil Wood, a forested ridge that overlooked the Avre River, just 19 kilometres (12 miles) southeast of Amiens. They arrived to find the French troops preparing to withdraw, and only after much persuasion was the brigade's commander, Brigadier General JEB Seely, able to convince them to hold their positions. He then ordered his men to clear the wood, which was already almost completely occupied by the German forces.

For the last nine days, the brigade had been heavily engaged in a series of rearguard actions with the advancing Germans, and almost every squadron was understrength. Still, the men were happy to be on the offensive for a change, and they took to their task with renewed confidence and enthusiasm. Seely's plan called for most of the brigade to clear the woods by attacking from the north, south and west. At the same time, C Squadron of Lord Strathcona's Horse was sent racing around the northeast corner of the wood to cut off any German reinforcements from entering the treeline from the east.

C Squadron was under the command of 33-year-old Lieutenant Gordon Muriel



Lieutenant Gordon Muriel Flowerdew was a British-born Canadian rancher who led C Squadron of Lord Strathcona's Horse in a daring charge against German troops at the Battle of Moreuil Wood

"THE SQUADRON (LESS ONE TROOP) PASSED OVER BOTH LINES, KILLING MANY OF THE ENEMY WITH THE SWORD; AND WHEELING ABOUT GALLOPING ON THEM AGAIN. ALTHOUGH THE SQUADRON HAD THEN LOST ABOUT 70 PER CENT OF ITS MEMBERS, KILLED AND WOUNDED FROM RIFLE AND MACHINE GUN FIRE DIRECTED ON IT FROM THE FRONT AND BOTH FLANKS, THE ENEMY BROKE AND RETIRED"

VC recommendation

Flowerdew. Like a large percentage of Canadian troops, Flowerdew was British born, having immigrated to Canada from Norfolk at the turn of the century to take up ranching in British Columbia. His youthful face, colourful surname and affable nature earned him the nickname 'Flowers' by the men, with whom he was very popular. Over the course of the war, he had risen from the rank of corporal to lieutenant and had been slightly wounded the year before. As he set off on his latest mission with C Squadron, he was briefly joined by Seely, who told him that "this was the most adventurous task of all; but I am confident you will succeed."



Left: For much of the war, the Canadian Cavalry Brigade had little to do in a static trench war. The German Spring Offensive in 1918 gave it a new-found purpose

Flowerdew smiled and replied, "I know, sir, I know, it is a splendid moment. I will try not to fail you."

Moreuil Wood was as thick with Germans as it was with budding beech trees. Initial attacks on horseback suffered heavy casualties from machine gun and sniper fire, and the Canadians were forced to dismount and attack on foot with bayonets fixed. Flowerdew's C Squadron, however, made good progress. As they approached the northeast corner of the wood they killed a number of Germans, who were looting a French transport wagon. Flowerdew left Lieutenant Frederick Harvey, VC, and a few men behind to flush out any more Germans in the area, then led his squadron up a ridge to the edge of the treeline with the intention of sweeping south and cutting the enemy off as ordered.

As the squadron crested the ridge, they spotted about 300 enemy infantry, arrayed in two lines, supported by artillery and machine guns. It was later learned that the German soldiers had been positioned there in anticipation of a rumoured Allied tank attack from the north. Flowerdew took one look at the Germans milling about and immediately recognised the unique opportunity that had finally presented itself to the Lieutenant and his Canadian cavalry. "It's a charge, boys, it's a charge," he bellowed as he spurred his horse forward. Behind him, the 75 men of C Squadron drew their 1908 Pattern cavalry swords and did the same.

Cavalry doctrine dictated that the squadron should have formed into several lines, then advanced at a walk, trot, canter, and finally a gallop. But given that the enemy was only 275 metres (900 feet) away and already preparing to receive the charge, there was no time for any of that. In fact, the squadron's boy trumpeter tried to sound the charge, but was cut down by German fire before he could blow a note.

Almost immediately, the enemy opened up with everything they had, including artillery. Other than the heads and necks of their mounts, the Canadians had no cover available to them, and within seconds men and horses everywhere were crashing to the ground. Flowerdew led from the front, sword in the air, urging his troopers on. Just as the Canadians approached the first line of Germans, he was badly wounded in both thighs and fell to the ground, yet courageously continued to shout words of encouragement to his men as they charged past him.



Sir Alfred Munning's painting of Lieutenant Flowerdew's cavalry charge at the Battle of Moreuil. It currently hangs in the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa



The German Spring Offensive was led by elite battalions of storm troops – elite shock troops trained to infiltrate and overrun enemy trenches



"MOREUIL WOOD. THAT IS WHERE THE CANADIAN CAVALRY BRIGADE SAVED THE DAY. THOSE WONDERFUL MEN HELD THE BORDERS OF THE WOOD AND EVEN REGAINED GROUND UNDER THE COMMAND OF GALLANT SEELY. YES, THERE WERE THE ROYAL CANADIAN DRAGOONS, THE LORD STRATHCONA'S HORSE AND THE FORT GARRY HORSE – I SHALL NEVER FORGET THEM"

Marshal Ferdinand Foch

Those Canadians that managed to reach the German lines hacked and slashed furiously at the enemy but were eventually overwhelmed and forced to retreat. Only one trooper, Sergeant Wooster, managed to fight his way through both enemy lines. Finding himself suddenly totally alone on the foggy battlefield, he galloped back to Seely to report that the entire squadron had been destroyed. It was an exaggeration, but not by much. A third of the squadron had been killed and another 15 mortally wounded.

Among the dying was Flowerdew. Two Royal Canadian Dragoons found him bleeding heavily but conscious and in surprisingly good spirits near the treeline. As he was being carried away, machine gun fire wounded one of his rescuers in the foot. Despite the severity of his own wounds, he insisted that the two men seek cover immediately. Four other men eventually carried him to a first aid post, from which he was evacuated to a field hospital near Namps. One of his legs was amputated, but unfortunately his life could not be saved and he died the following day.

Fighting in Moreuil Wood continued to rage back and forth for two more days before the Canadians, reinforced by the British Third Cavalry Brigade and supported by the Royal Flying Corps, permanently captured the position. Flowerdew's gallant charge had the effect of helping to distract the Germans and stymieing their advance. By 5 April, after two weeks of impressive territorial gains, Operation Michael lost all momentum, having made it no further than Moreuil. In the weeks that followed, the initiative on the Western Front shifted to the Allies, and within seven months the war was over.

Three months after the battle, Flowerdew's posthumous Victoria Cross was presented to his mother and sisters by King George V in the Quadrangle at Buckingham Palace. It currently resides in Framlingham College in Suffolk, his childhood boarding school. In 1918, C Squadron's charge was immortalised in a painting by the prolific Great War artist and fellow Framlingham pupil, Sir Alfred Munnings. The painting currently hangs in the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa. To this day, Lord Strathcona's Horse, now an armoured regiment, annually commemorates the charge and Battle of Moreuil Wood as the exemplification of their regimental motto: "Perseverance".

Images: Alamy

HENRY JOHNSON

World War I: A German night raid on French positions is repelled by a fearless US 'Hellfighter'

WORDS JACK GRIFFITHS

Henry Lincoln Johnson is the definition of under-appreciated. One of the heroes of World War I, his outstanding act of bravery and dedication to a fellow soldier is really quite remarkable.

In the years prior to his finest hour, Johnson was earning a living as a rail porter at Albany Union Station. Standing at 5ft 4 and weighing 130 pounds, the former chauffeur and coal labourer was by no means a born soldier but he was quick to sign up when President Woodrow Wilson declared war against Germany in 1917. Johnson enlisted at the Marcy Avenue Armory in Brooklyn and was soon sent to Carolina for training, leaving his wife Edna and three children behind.

Johnson was assigned to the 15th New York National Guard Regiment, which was later renamed the 369th Infantry. This was the first African-American regiment of the war and it was here that he would first meet his great friend Needham Roberts.

The early days of military service didn't go smoothly as brawls regularly broke out between black and white troops. When they sailed over to French soil, life didn't get much better as the two privates and their company were slapped with menial tasks such as digging latrines. Being African-American, Johnson and Roberts were subjected to segregation and their Labor Unit was given the worst tasks that their commanders could think of.

When the time finally came for frontline duty, the rest of the US forces reportedly refused to fight alongside the African-American regiments. The company was determined to contribute as much as possible to the war effort so the decision was made to put the 369th, or the 'Black Rattlers', under the operational control of the French Fourth Army, who were short of troops in the fight against the German Empire. A notorious document called 'Secret Information Concerning Black American Troops' was even given to the French to dispel any negative tales they had been told from the other US divisions.

The company was stationed at Outpost 20 in the Argonne Forest in north-eastern France. Johnson and Roberts were given French helmets and weapons and learned basic French so they could understand their new comrades.

May 1918 saw fresh German offensives into Northern France and it wasn't long until the men were pressed into action. On the night of 14 May, Privates Johnson and Roberts were on the midnight to 4am shift on double sentry duty, when they heard the sound of wire cutters on the camp's perimeter fence. They were then forced to take evasive action as they were shot at by sniper fire. Opening up a box of 30 grenades, the men readied themselves for battle.

While Johnson hurled the projectiles at the oncoming raiding party, Roberts sprinted back towards the main camp for backup. However, after seeing between 20 and 40 men advancing on Johnson, he turned back to help his friend. They returned fire but in no time ferocious hand-to-hand combat had broken out.

Roberts, who had been struck more seriously than Johnson, was unable to fight effectively with wounds to his arm and hip. He still managed to make himself useful by handing grenades to Johnson who threw them over the parapet.

Soon they ran out of projectiles and in the confusion Johnson tried to arm his French rifle with a US cartridge, jamming the mechanism. Drawing his nine-inch double-edged bolo knife from his belt, Johnson fought on despite grenade and shotgun wounds.

In the heat of battle, Johnson noticed Roberts being carried away by the Germans. Determined not to let his good friend become a prisoner of war, he made his way towards him using his broken rifle as a club and even his fists. His dogged defence and total disregard for his own life kept the German soldiers at bay until they heard the distant advance of French and US troops and made a hasty retreat. The skirmish

FOR VALOUR



The Croix de Guerre rewarded great bravery and courage. Introduced in 1915, it was open to solders, sailors and airmen from all allied powers. Bronze and silver versions were both available and variations of the decoration were awarded into WWII.

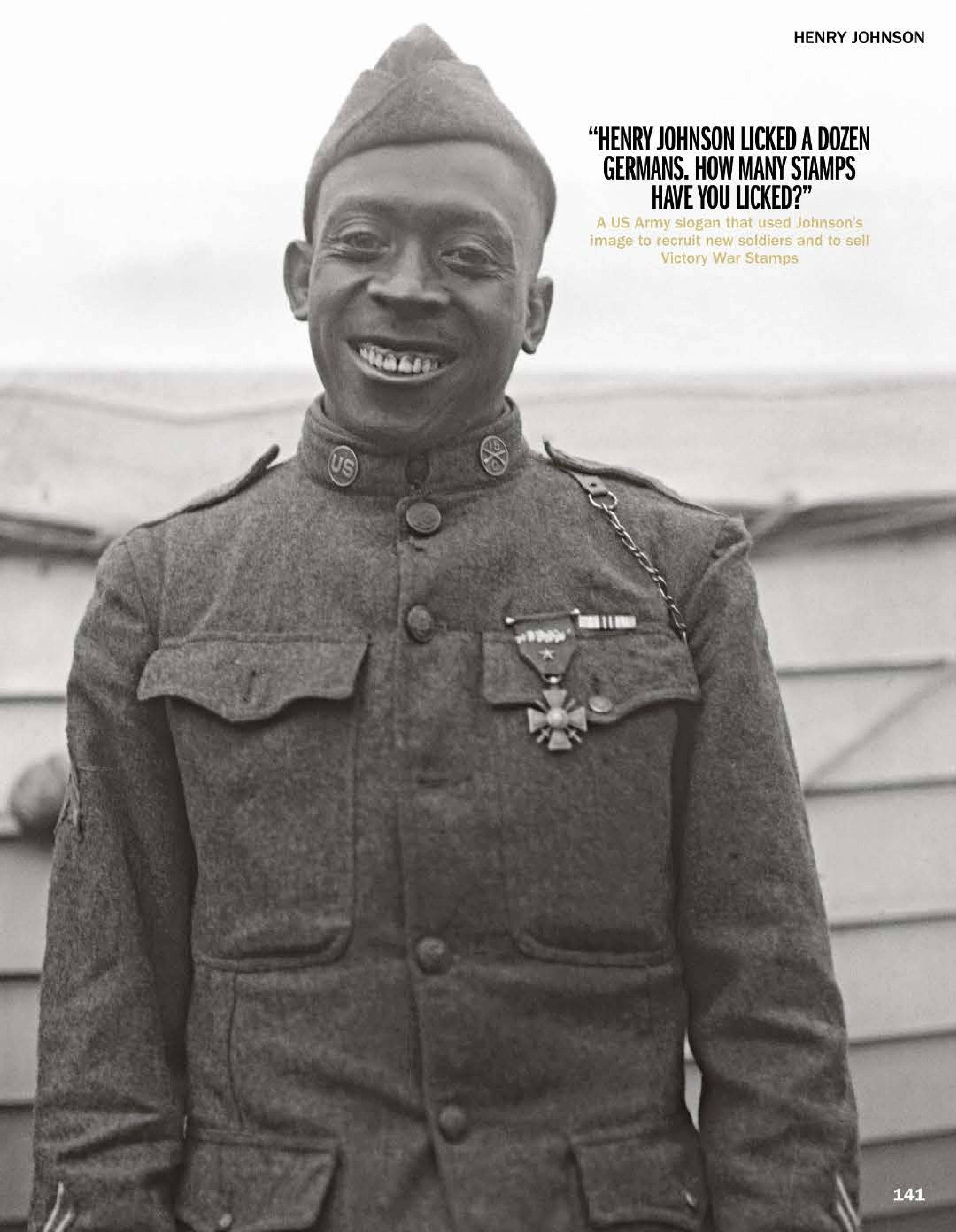
WHY DID HE WIN IT?
For an act of heroism in defending an outpost from a German raid of much greater numbers. Johnson helped save the life of Private Needham Roberts, who was severely wounded.

WHEN WAS HE AWARDED THE CROSS?
c. 1918

WHERE WAS THE BATTLE?
Argonne Forest, Champagne, France

WHEN DID IT TAKE PLACE?
14 May 1918

WHAT WAS THE POPULAR REACTION?
Johnson returned home to a hero's welcome in his hometown of Albany. The US government, however, was less helpful and he was denied a disability pension. He was eventually awarded US honours posthumously.



"HENRY JOHNSON LICKED A DOZEN GERMANS. HOW MANY STAMPS HAVE YOU LICKED?"

A US Army slogan that used Johnson's image to recruit new soldiers and to sell Victory War Stamps

"EACH SLASH MEANT SOMETHING, BELIEVE ME; I WASN'T DOING EXERCISES, LET ME TELL YOU"

Henry Johnson

had lasted about an hour and the two men were then forced to wait it out until morning broke and reinforcements arrived. Johnson cared for Roberts for hours, ensuring that his 17-year-old buddy could fight another day, but his act of gallantry had taken its toll on the weary Albany native and as help reached them, he collapsed absolutely exhausted.

Waking up in the morning light of a French field hospital, Private Johnson learned that he had killed four Germans, including one lieutenant, and had wounded between 10 and 20 more. He had successfully protected the French line, but had received a total of 21 wounds from gunshots and grenade blasts. Back on the battlefield, a patrol from 369th Company found that the German's blood trailed back almost to his own lines. This was the carnage that the young American had caused and the name 'Hellfighters' would now stick with the company forever. As for Johnson, he was given the nickname 'Black Death' for his ferocity in battle.

Indebted to their efforts in saving the camp, the French military hierarchy awarded the two men with the Croix de Guerre military decoration. France's highest award for bravery, this was a massive honour to the two privates who were the first Americans to receive the medal and were both promoted to sergeant. Johnson was additionally given a golden palm wreath on his ribbon for 'extraordinary valour'.

After the defeat of the Triple Alliance, the Hellfighters returned home to be greeted by a parade in New York. Johnson rode in an open-top Cadillac, but the parade would be the limit of his rewards. The hero was denied a disability pension and was even refused a Purple Heart, a US military decoration given to those wounded in service.

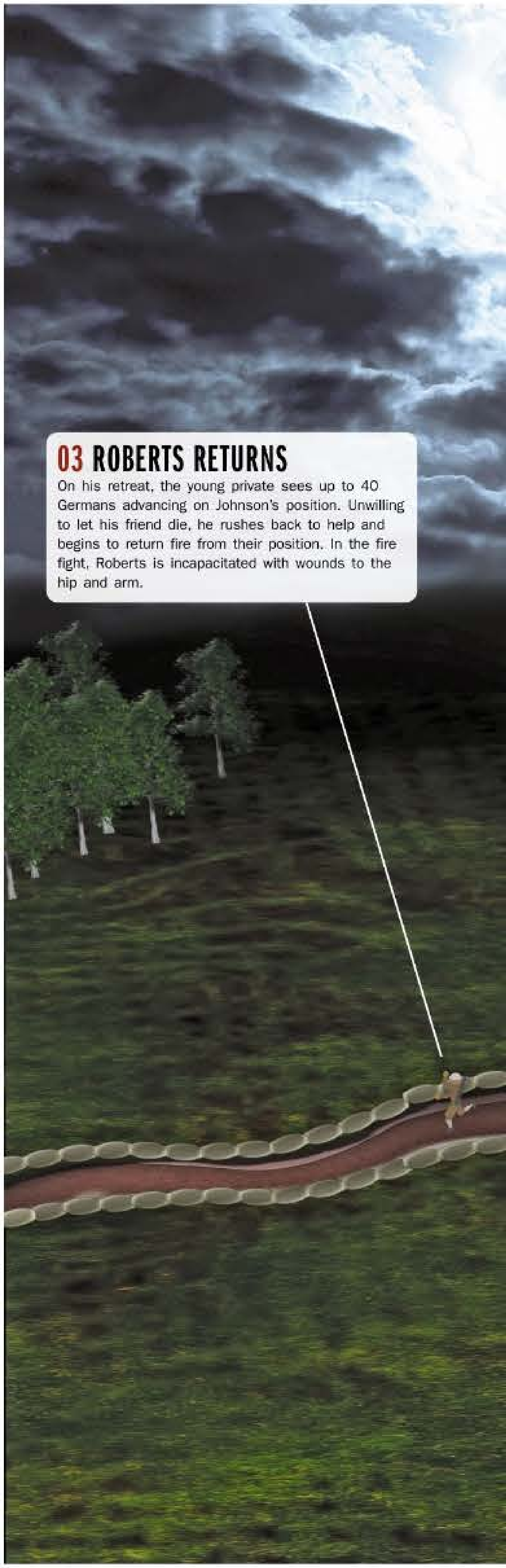
Johnson was given a hero's welcome by the people of Albany, and the Fort Orange Club (a prestigious venue in the area) hosted a tea for his wife, Edna. Pictures of Johnson and Roberts sold in great number and were even used as recruitment tools, as the men lectured the youth on their war experiences.

Life was seemingly good for the Johnson family but in private, the great man was struggling. After being denied work back at the Union Station due to his wounds, he found it difficult to get another job. Uneducated and in his early twenties, Johnson, like many of the other returning soldiers, could not overcome the trauma and injury he had suffered in France. The turmoil eventually drove him to hit the bottle and soon his wife and children left him behind. He died penniless in 1929 aged 32.

Herman Johnson, once believed to be Henry's son, managed to locate Henry's grave 63 years later in Arlington National Cemetery. The discovery helped the memory of Johnson gain momentum and soon a movement was raised to award him higher honours. In 1996 he was awarded the Purple Heart and in 2003 the moment came when the World War I hero was given what he had always deserved, the Distinguished Service Cross. After a lengthy and often stalled campaign, in 2015 he was finally posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroism. The efforts made by Henry Johnson in the spring of 1918 have finally been appreciated.



On his return to New York, Johnson was paraded in an open-top Cadillac



03 ROBERTS RETURNS

On his retreat, the young private sees up to 40 Germans advancing on Johnson's position. Unwilling to let his friend die, he rushes back to help and begins to return fire from their position. In the fire fight, Roberts is incapacitated with wounds to the hip and arm.



Corbis; PZ Graphics

HEROES OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

True stories of heroism from all sides and theatres of the Great War



High command

The leaders, politicians and generals who had to make the hardest decisions



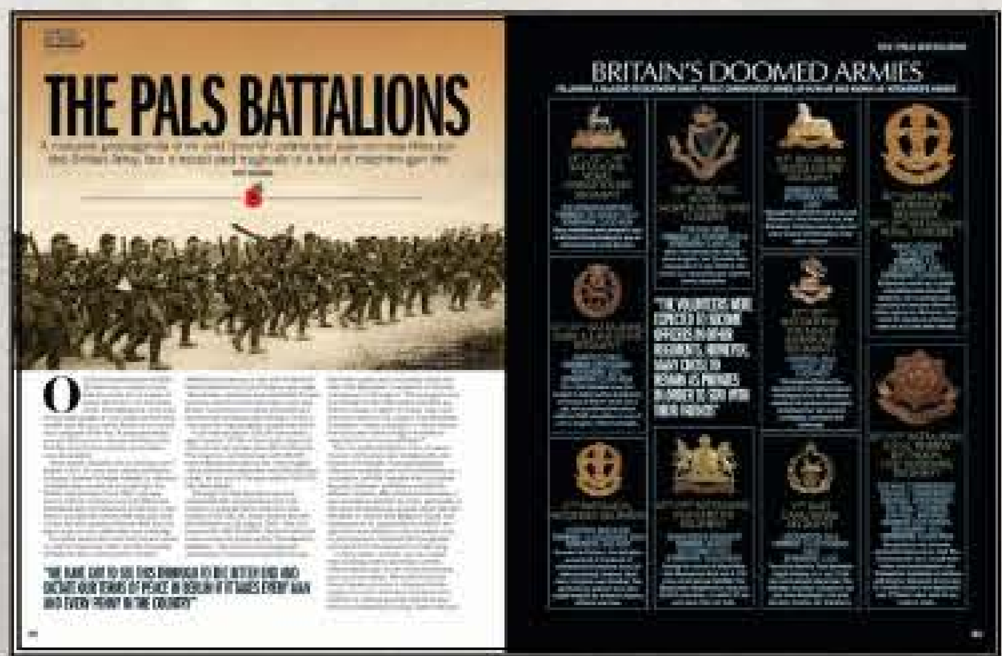
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